"I Sort of Hate to Leave This Room," Angela Began

MASQUES

BY

ELIZABETH HALL YATES

Illustrated by
RALPH P. COLEMAN

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PROLOGUE

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1

WHY is it that people seldom form intimate friendships after they become of age? The average youngster has at least two or three cronies to whom he divulges his most sacrosanct thoughts. But the soul secrets of any person between the ages of thirteen and eighteen aren't vastly important or particularly interesting, anyway. One's inner life at that period is so similar to the inner life of one's associates. Perhaps that is why it's so easy to talk about. Later, when character begins to develop more definitely and there is a difference between us and our friends that has shown itself already in our outer lives—then, instinctively, we try to conceal this difference. We want to be like everyone else. Deviation from the beaten path may mean criticism or scorn or pity, and we're rather afraid of those things. So—on with the masque of convention, and don't let anyone glimpse beneath!

The Fahnstock family, it would seem, didn't have anything to hide; New York boasts of a hundred families made in their pattern. The word "boasts" is significant. They were the sort of people that Middle Westerners picture in their minds' eyes when the great metropolis is mentioned.

A town house and one on Long Island; dinner at seven-thirty; a standing account with the best known theater ticket speculator; and seats at the opera on alternate Mondays. Mrs. Fahnstock attended *Madame Butterfly* once a year. It made her cry and she found it refreshing. But aside from that performance the seats remained, for the most part, vacant. As a family, the Fahnstocks were not musical enthusiasts.

They sent their two children to the best school and college that could be found. The children lacked distinction as students, but were popular with the undergraduates.

Mr. Fahnstock had an excellent rating in Bradstreet and Dun, and he smoked Russian cigars. He was what is oratorically known as a "captain of finance." He liked to read detective stories.

For the Fahnstocks, you see, according to New York standards, were quite all right. Their names were in the papers whenever they went abroad, or when some relative died, or every January when they gave their yearly reception. There was no scandal attached to them, and they were pleasant people to know. What if they had never heard of Puvis de Chavannes, or if they thought Max Beerbohm was a Shakespearian actor? They gave delightful little dinners and their invitations were seldom refused. New York was proud of them.

The Hennys, on the other hand, were not so fortunate. At least in Miss Vera Henny's private

opinion they were not. Siam, Ohio, was the seat of their estate, and that fact in itself was enough to cause the young lady of the house to shudder whenever she was asked about her home.

She had been sent on to New York to the same school that Mildred Fahnstock was attending. Mr. and Mrs. Willis Henny wished Vera to have every advantage that it was possible for them to give her.

But let it be said that the older Hennys didn't in any way consider themselves unsuccessful. They had all the money that they could make use of; they were the leaders of their community; a kindly, contented, generous couple, they thanked the Lord for His good gifts and looked out upon their narrow world with the naïveté of two happy children. Education was the one thing they didn't have, and they were all the more determined that Vera should make up for it.

They failed to realize, however, that in sending her to a fashionable school in New York, they were at the same time giving Vera the opportunity to learn to despise the very things that they liked, that instead of mastering French and Latin she was, even so early in life, learning the art of masquerading.

So, during all of the long four years that she was away the Hennys kept her image in their minds. And now it was spring, and presently she was coming home again, this time to stay. They were ingenuously anxious for her arrival.

The Days complete our triangle of families. Though one could hardly call old Mrs. Day and her granddaughter a "family." There had been more of them once; Mrs. Day had been the mother of five children. Then misfortune after misfortune had befallen the clan until there were only these two, herself, and Angela, left. Closing her Spartan eyes to the past, the old lady lived now in the present, in Angela's, her granddaughter's, present. And because she willed it with all the strength of her rugged mind, she was happy. She had made Angela happy.

As far as lineage was concerned, the Days were perhaps the best endowed. There were all sorts of distinguished ancestors, and there were quaint old family legends that had been passed down from the Middle Ages. Not that it mattered to Angela. She had been carefully taught that gentleness springs only from the heart, and that a king's son may be a cad, and a beggar, a hero. Her grandmother had seen to it that these principles were understood.

It had been rather against Mrs. Day's better judgment that she had entered her granddaughter in The Shelborough School. Anything that had the name of being fashionable she usually avoided. But it happened that Mrs. Shelborough had been an old friend; Mrs. Day had been sorry for her, in the first place. Angela had gone to kindergarten at Shelborough and it hadn't seemed to hurt her, so

she had gone on and on until, now, with Vera Henny and Mildred Fahnstock, she was on the eve of her graduation. And still she didn't seem any the worse for her finishing-school education. Mrs. Day was relieved at the approaching release; she knew that no harm would be done after all.

Three families, then, and from these families, three girls who represent their younger generation. Average American daughters of respectable people. All of them had tried smoking and didn't like it; two of them were given to profanity at an early age, but had recovered; Vera had once drunk too much champagne punch at a wedding; and Mildred was certainly over-sentimental. They were, on the whole, a great deal like their elders. A bit more foolish, perhaps. They lacked experience.

2

Dr. Albert De Lancey Shelborough, principal and owner of The Shelborough School for Girls, New York City, sat in his office on a warm May morning with his helpmate and under-principal, Mrs. Albert De Lancey Shelborough. With his thick, neatly manicured fingers, he was going through the letter file of this year's graduating class. His broad brow was furrowed, and his mouth beneath the stiff gray mustache and beard was self-important. Even with his wife he never lost his schoolmaster manner. It was as much a part of him as his excellent gray toupee. One sus-

pected that he did not discard either in the privacy of his own bedroom.

His voice resounded with hearty satisfaction as he closed the file. "Fourteen girls, my dear. The largest class we've graduated. And not a condition in the class."

Mrs. Shelborough glanced up from her desk, where she was writing with a squeaky pen. Her delicate hand paused waveringly above the paper, her shy, dark eyes were doubtful.

"Except for Mildred Fahnstock," she said timidly. "Of course she was conditioned, but you ——"

"Mildred Fahnstock graduates on her own merits," the doctor retorted. "True, she failed in mathematics, and if she were going to college I should have been obliged to condition her. But as it is, her excellent work in æsthetic dancing nicely balances her failure in algebra. I dare say her dancing will be of more use to her in her future life. At any rate, her father wished her to be graduated. And, as you know, the Fahnstocks are charming people—very wealthy. Oh, yes indeed—very wealthy."

Mrs. Shelborough returned to her writing. Thirty years of weak protest, her own idealism against her husband's shrewd materialism, had left its mark upon her gentle ineffectual features.

"I'm sorry," she sighed, "sorry to see those girls go. They never come back to visit us between the

five-yearly reunions. We just lose them. I don't always mind so much, but—Mildred, and Vera, and Angela ——"

She was interrupted by a snort from her husband.

"I wouldn't waste my affection on any of them, my dear. Mildred is a nice little thing, but she has no brains. Vera is handsome enough, but absolutely without emotion of any sort. And Angela —well, she's very pleasant and agreeable—and her grandmother is always prompt with her tuition—that's an advantage. But it doesn't pay to become too intimate with the girls. Once we're through with them, we don't want them hanging about. It doesn't pay, my dear. I've told you that before."

"No, Bert. But I ——"

The thought died, even as it was born, and once again she recommenced her writing. The office, offensive in its self-conscious good taste and studied simplicity, like a smug old maid, was quiet except for the doleful pen which scratched irregularly.

Presently Dr. Shelborough rose and walked across the room, his hands clasped behind his back, his feet meeting the floor at each step squarely and firmly. He halted before a framed rotogravure of the Acropolis. It was his fond fancy that he derived a certain inspiration from that representation of ancient perfection. He had worn a path in the Wilton rug between the wall on which it hung, and his own desk chair.

To-morrow was another Commencement Day. Which meant, for him, another speech to the graduating class, another admonitory injunction embellished by flowery phrases and a quivering voice.

"We send you forth into a world of struggle and disappointments. . . ." (Sniff.) "To face Life clear-eyed and valiant . . . without our loving guidance and protection. . . ." (Chokingly.) "Crusaders against a vicious humanity . . . splendid representatives of the school and its ideals . . . so many lilies of the field . . . remain pure and unspotted . . . our blessings. . . ." (And his handkerchief raised to his eyes at the end of the speech, with just the right amount of shame and deprecation for the emotion he was displaying.)

Thirty years of routine had made the doctor as incapable of change or originality as the sun. He still went through the ceremony of pretending to himself that his beloved Parthenon animated his mind, causing him to cull new ideas from year to year. As a matter of fact, his speeches were practically identical. Parents, hearing them for the first time, wept over them, while their daughters, who knew each sentence by heart, passed notes and played surreptitious games of "hang-man" and "boxes."

A splendid, accurate machine, a trifle in need of oiling, a trifle worn, but still powerful. He had built up his business from a beginning of only six

pupils to what was considered by many now to be the best private school in the city.

His wife was possibly his greatest asset. People often wondered how she had ever happened to marry him. Her maiden name was Katherine Fuller, and she came of old New York stock. An attractive, quiet young girl, at the age of eighteen she had been left an orphan. Albert Shelborough, entering her life just then, had seen the advantages of annexing a woman in her position, and his sympathy in her bereavement was magnificent. In her loneliness, she fell quite desperately in love with him, and she became his wife within a year.

Naturally enough, Miss Fuller's friends, the Turners, had sent their children to her husband's school. And then the Andrews had come on account of the Turners, and the Greenes because of the Andrews, and so the school had grown to its present size of nearly two hundred girls.

"S-H-E-L-B-O-R-O-U-G-H! S-H-E-L-B-O-R-O-U-G-H! NINETEEN-SIXTEEN! NINETEEN-SIXTEEN! NINETEEN-SIXTEEN!"

Fourteen happy voices floated down the marble staircase outside the office. One o'clock, the last day of school, the graduating class giving its farewell cheer.

Dr. Shelborough frowned at the interruption of his thoughts. Then his face relaxed. Nineteen-sixteen . . . that class had meant much to his

success. One thousand times fourteen, plus the extra fees for music and gymnasium, and with the additional profit on books and stationery—really not bad at all.

His wife's writing had ceased, and he swung about. She had risen and was going toward the door.

"I thought I'd run up-stairs a moment, Bert," she explained with a tremulous lift of her sparse eyebrows. "It's the last opportunity I'll have. And I'd like to see Mildred and Vera and Angela before they ——"

He dismissed her with an impatient wave of his wide hand. Her sentimentality was one of her most annoying traits. He heard her quick, nervous step click on the stone stairs as she ascended, then the eager cry of greeting when she entered the room above.

Frowning, he turned back to the lonely grandeur of his Acropolis for inspiration.

3

Mildred and Vera and Angela; the three leaders of the class, thrust into incongruous intimacy because of their mutual prominence.

Mildred Fahnstock—soft, appealing, with baby skin and ash-blonde hair that curled at the nape of the neck; an upper lip that protruded innocently. She liked to think of herself as "a man's woman." She was, indeed, inclined to be rather bored when

in the exclusive society of her own sex. Men—and she called any male above the age of sixteen a "man"—had a delightful and peculiar interest for her. Milly ranked as the best dancer in the school, the worst flirt, the most popular with the under classes.

Vera Henny; the beauty of the class as well as its athlete. A splendid creature of superb physique, a handsome, expressionless face. Vera was an excellent student. She had the gift of a good memory, and she was clever enough to discover what sort of answers to questions her various teachers required. She kept a note-book containing favorite phrases used by members of the faculty and her examination papers were filled with them. She was the president of her class, the star of school amateur theatricals. Her utter lack of a sense of humor was remarkable.

And Angela Day. Pale, irregular features that lit when she laughed. Hands with slim, straight fingers; frank eyes, a mass of hair the color of a robin's breast. A girl with a never waning, unsophisticated joy in living, and a supreme impatience with the commonplace stupidities of people like Dr. Shelborough. A bit of a prude. The author of the class play, *Telemachus,* and editor of the school paper.

"S-H-E-L-B-O-R-O-U-G-H! S-H-E-L-B-O-R-O-U-G-H! NINETEEN-SIXTEEN! NINETEEN-SIXTEEN! NINETEEN-SIXTEEN!"

The cheer ended with a bang of desk tops and the girls, one by one and in groups, hurried out into the hallway like so many pardoned prisoners. The "Big Three," alone, hung behind.

"I sort of hate to leave this room," Angela began. "It's sentimental to feel that way, but I ——"

"Well, I can't say that I do," Vera's cold voice cut in. "I've been here four years and I'm glad I'm through. How about you, Milly?"

Mildred, her plump body perched on one of the window sills, her brown eyes gazing off dreamily into space, came to with a start.

"She was thinking of one of her latest beaux," Angela laughed. "You shouldn't have disturbed her, Vee."

Mildred giggled. "Oh, no I wasn't. Haven't got any beaux!"

She didn't lisp, and yet something in her inflection gave the effect of baby-talk. She slid from the sill and paddled over to Angela, where she climbed upon one of the desks and rested her feet on a chair.

"I'll tell you just one thing," she confided, and she beckoned with a plump finger to Vera, who half-heartedly joined the others. "You know George Warbridge?—he adores me. I suppose"—she waved one arm in a vague gesture—"I suppose if I lived to be a hundred he'd still adore me. Well, last night he came over to see me, and I told him I was going away to the country for the summer so

soon, and everything. And—and what do you think? He ——"

"I suppose he kissed you," Vera broke in calmly. "That's easy to guess. Why do you make such a fuss about it?"

Mildred pouted.

"Why, Milly!" Angela cried, her frank eyes widening. "You didn't let him kiss you when you aren't engaged? You wouldn't be so ——"

"Shhh —!" Mildred hissed, and a perceptible wave of relief passed across her face as the principal's wife appeared in the doorway. Angela was sometimes fearfully tiresome.

Mrs. Shelborough thrust her head in at the door like a shy child. "I thought I'd just come and see you a moment before you go," she began. "It's the last day and ——"

The three girls rose.

"Come in, do!"

"Sit down here, with us!"

"So glad you did come!"

Perhaps it was because Mrs. Shelborough never gave orders that she had endeared herself to the pupils. Perhaps it was because they were sorry for her. But probably it was neither of these reasons. She had caught them all talking during study periods a hundred times, and had never reported the matter. That fact in itself was enough to explain her popularity. At any rate, to Angela she seemed a dear little woman who would have

been quite splendid, except for her husband; Mildred thought her "too sweet"—and even Vera didn't object to her.

"You're going to leave us," Mrs. Shelborough murmured. She looked at each of the three young faces, and her glance was searching, wistful. "I wonder what the future has in store for you. I hope it will be kind to you. I hope ——"

"Oh," Angela cried, "we're going to make our own futures! We have it all planned."

"Yes," Mildred chimed in, "Angela's going to be a famous authoress and Vera an actress and I'm —I'm ——"

"She's going to get married within two years," Angela predicted. "We don't know to whom, yet, but she's headed down-stream."

Vera added: "And she'll live happily forever after—won't you, Milly?"

Mildred blushed prettily.

Mrs. Shelborough laughed, then sobered suddenly. "If only one could plan the future. But—well, I wish you all success. That's what I came for. I—I probably shan't see you again before the five-yearly reunion."

"Of course you will!" All three were equally indignant.

But Mrs. Shelborough smiled faintly. "No. You'll intend to come back, but you'll have other interests. I've seen it so often." She paused, then hesitatingly began again: "Girls—you say that you

are going to direct your own lives. I hope you may —but—but wouldn't it be interesting after five years to see how far each of you has succeeded?"

Angela's pale features lighted. "Yes. To meet at the reunion and compare notes on what we've done. I'd love that!"

"Lots of fun!" Mildred agreed.

"We'll do it if you like," Vera responded. "Of course we'll see each other meanwhile, probably. But we'll come and tell you what we've done, Mrs. Shelborough. Just to prove that one can be master of one's destiny—in spite of what the scientists say."

Thus the plan was formed, and three eager faces looked out into the future.

Mrs. Shelborough sighed. . . . She had seen so many such faces before. . . . She wondered. . . .

4

The assembly hall decorated sparsely with senile palms; weary smilax loosely twined about Greek pillars. Perspiring parents uselessly fanning themselves with four-inch programs, while they nervously rehearse their daughters' coming recitations in their own minds. Dr. Shelborough in a morning coat, with a bow of genial recognition for everyone, his wife in gray, slightly flushed and already worried over her duty of passing him the diplomas after his speech.

Suddenly the blurt of the organ in the first measures of the school hymn, and all eyes to the doorway.

"We march, we march to victoeree
With the cross of the Lord befoeruss,
With His Loving Eye looking down from
the sky
And His Holy Arm spreadoeruss, His
Holy Arm spreadoeruss!

We come in the might ——"

The processional, led by the younger children, singing lustily and marching out of step, then growing taller, class by class until the end, the graduates.

A pretty class, as pretty as lovely gowns and careful grooming could make them. Perhaps a trifle too pretty, over-cultivated, over-perfect.

A chord, and the school sinking into chairs unevenly, like waves of the sea. A general rustling of programs.

Mildred Fahnstock, first. She rose and wavered to the platform, where she bowed in formal fashion as though she were about to do a minuet. Her frock of organdy and real lace showed the trembling of her plump body, her bouquet of sweetheart roses quivered pathetically. She gave the salutation in perfect French, her accent precisely Parisian, but quavering. As she finished, she was

rewarded by a rousing burst of applause from the undergraduates, many of whom had "crushes" on her. She returned to her seat with relief; now she could enjoy the rest of the program.

Vera, next. Calm, cool, perfectly poised, in her simple white crêpe. A voice like hers must not pass unnoticed on Commencement Day—particularly when it was so well suited to Shelley's *Ozymandias of Egypt,* a favorite of the doctor's. She knew that she recited well; she had no thrill at her reception. When it was over she only felt a trifle scornful.

For Angela Day, the valedictory. . . . She hadn't wanted it ordinary, but it was, absurdly so. She had written her speech herself, had said what she really thought, what she knew that her class thought. Her paper had been promptly confiscated by the head of the English Department and a more conventional speech substituted. She delivered it now, half-wearily, half-rebelliously. She bade the school a sweet but sad farewell while inwardly she felt an anarchistic impulse to fling her bouquet swiftly and surely at Dr. Shelborough's square, beatific head.

Once she was seated the good doctor, himself, arose. He fitted his thick fingers neatly across his rounded abdomen, smiled balmily, and began.

"To-day we are at the crossroads . . . where the brook and river meet . . . little birds leaving the nest. . . ."

Mildred shifted restlessly and wondered whether

George Warbridge would bring her violets to-night, when he came. Vera, beside her, sat gazing with bored eyes at one of the doctor's shoes, mentally counting the number of times that he used the word "little."

But Angela was far away. . . . Would life really be so different, now? Were they truly at the crossroads? Or was that simply another one of Dr. Shelborough's stupid exaggerations? . . . She was eager to find out.

BOOK I

MILDRED

CHAPTER I

1

On the night after Mildred's graduation, George Warbridge came again. Although she wasn't supposed to have the same caller more than twice in a week, an exception was sometimes made in George's case. He was the sort of young chap to whom no family could possibly object. If he married Mildred she would be comfortably settled for life, if he didn't she would be left none the worse off for having been thought engaged to him.

Of course Milly was extremely young, and she hadn't been formally brought out as yet. There was plenty of time for her to think of marriage. She was already thinking of it quite hard, though, if the truth were known.

George, in Milly's eyes, was a godsend. She had quarrelled with the victim of her last flirtation, just after becoming definitely, though privately, engaged to him. George filled the gap so nicely. One never could be really excited over him, but he was so well-groomed, and she could go with him to dances and show people that there was still a very desirable fish in her sea. Particularly she could flaunt him before the sight of her former lover.

He had a great many pleasant little habits that attracted her to him. He sent her flowers fre-

quently, and his taste in corsage bouquets was almost too perfect for a man. Yet he wasn't in the least a mollycoddle. His ruddy skin and somewhat stocky physique proved that.

Then there were some things about him that she didn't like so well. She didn't like the way he sat, with his feet far apart and rather toed-in. And she didn't like his eyes. They never sparkled, or danced, or twinkled, or had any of the expressions that eyes are supposed to have. They just looked at you, and occasionally they blinked.

But George wouldn't make a bad husband at all. If the worst came to the worst, she could always accept him. And he adored her. Mildred had been certain of that ever since he had kissed her the night before. He had seemed a bit reticent until then; she hadn't known quite how to explain his reserve. George, however, was not one to kiss lightly and forget. For the first time she was even slightly, ever so slightly thrilled by him. She speculated as to whether the feeling would last.

When he came that evening, he brought her violets, just as she had hoped he would. Only they were big single ones, and there was a queer green orchid in the center. They were exquisite.

"Oh, George! How *dear* of you!"

She had fluttered down the marble staircase when she heard the maid admit him, and she was untying the box while he laid his overcoat and hat on the carved walnut table.

"Aren't they lovely?" She held the corsage to her waist and danced over to the wall-mirror. "George, you do bring me the most bee-youtiful things!"

He made no answer, but stood watching her with his bead-like eyes. He never talked much. That was one of the things about him of which Mildred especially approved. She liked to do the talking herself.

"Come in and sit down." She put one soft plump hand through his arm and drew him into the living-room. "I'll tell you all about the graduation. There, sit on the divan, and I'll—I'll sit beside you."

She giggled as she settled herself, and she gave the curls at the back of her neck an involuntary pat.

"The graduation ——?" George prompted.

"Oh, yes! It was wonderful. Everything went off so splendidly. I wish you could have been there."

"So do I."

"First I gave the salutation. I was awfully frightened. But I didn't forget a word and when I was finished they applauded—a lot. Wasn't that nice?"

"Fine. Then who came next?"

"Vera Henny. Do you remember her? She doesn't go in our crowd much, outside of school—only once in a while. She's very good-looking. Well—she gave a recitation, about the desert and a

Sphinx, or something. I didn't understand it very well."

"And then?"

"And then there was Angela Day. You do know her, of course."

George flushed. "Er—yes. What'd she do?"

"She gave the valedictory. Angela's so clever. She didn't look very pretty, though, I thought. She's awfully pale."

"I—I kind of like that about her. That, with her red hair."

"Oh." Milly stiffened. "Well. Angela's a very nice girl."

"You bet."

There was a pause. Milly didn't care for the turn the conversation was taking. She held her bouquet at arm's length admiringly, then buried her pink face in it.

"Ummm . . ." she breathed. "So sweet! Ummmm!"

She expected him to move closer, to cover the plump hand that she had let fall so carelessly on the blue brocade of the divan between them. But as she glanced up over her flowers, she saw his stolid profile. He wasn't even looking at her.

She turned to him, her soft mouth hurt. "George—tell me. Have I done anything to make you angry?"

His small eyes blinked. "No. Of course not. What's the matter?"

"I only thought—well, you sit there and you say nothing!" There was a trace of impatience in her childlike voice. "And—and you sit there and you do nothing! George—why on earth do you come at all?"

She hadn't meant to be cross, but he was so exasperating.

"Why—you asked me to come last night. And I thought I'd like to hear about the graduation. And I wanted to say good-bye, before you went away ——" he gulped. "You made me promise to come, honestly you did! I ——"

Milly's face was growing pinker. "How can you be so—so indelicate! The idea of my making you promise! As though you didn't want to come! And last night, when you—k-k-kissed me, I thought ——"

"Yes, but Milly, you wanted me to!" George protested earnestly. "You'd have been mad if I hadn't done ——"

This was more than Mildred Fahnstock would endure from any man. Tears sprang to her eyes, and she rose to her feet with all the majesty that her plump softness would permit. "George Warbridge ——" she extended the violets toward him with a haughty gesture. "You can take your old flowers, and—and I don't want to ever see you again—not ever!"

And so, Mildred found herself in a rather desolate and lonely state when she went up-stairs to her

bedroom that night. George had gone without even so much as a word of apology. All was over between them, she told herself. And that meant that there would have to be someone to take his place. But who? Things looked extremely black just then, to Milly.

2

It was Lake Mawosta for the Fahnstocks that summer. Mrs. Fahnstock was tired of housekeeping; she wouldn't open the house at Quogue, she would take a "real rest." (She explained this to all her friends in a weary, self-indulgent whine. She petted herself almost as much as she did Mildred.)

Rather a drawback for Mildred to have that mother. People who saw them together knew at once what Mildred would grow to be. Mrs. Fahnstock's plumpness sagged; her soft, baby cheeks were too artificially pink. She dressed exquisitely, though youthfully to the extreme, and her child-voice had turned into a whining drawl that grated after a few moments' conversation.

There were four in the family: Mildred, her mother, Mr. Fahnstock, who spent most of his time at the club and was regarded by the rest of the family as an easy banking system, and Malcolm. Malcolm was twenty, blond as Mildred, something of a "tea-hound," and he had the correct concave abdomen endorsed by all matinée heroes and college

boys. He spent his winters at Williams and his vacations at house-parties in the Berkshires, and his family knew him not quite as well as they knew the chauffeur, who had been with them almost two years.

So it was Mildred and her mother alone, who flitted to the Mawosta House that summer; flitted, much to Mildred's disgust, on the day after Commencement, the last of May. Mildred knew from experience in former years that every summer resort is dead as far as the male species is concerned until July; she would have much preferred to remain in New York at least until the colleges closed.

During the train trip Mildred was inclined to be decidedly morose. How she was going to exist from then until the Fourth of July, she couldn't conceive. But on the night of their arrival, while she and her mother were dressing for dinner—Mildred's summer life consisted of dressing and undressing four times a day, and canoeing between times—Mrs. Fahnstock made a remark the consequences of which were to mean much to her daughter.

"Milly," she drawled, "the water in the bathtub leaks most awfully. I wish you'd go to the desk and complain about it after dinner. I can't go myself, because I met the Thorntons and they're having bridge to-night. Will you remember, now, darling?"

"Yes, Mother," Mildred promised sweetly.

Mildred's disposition was almost always sweet. She would do anything for anyone, provided that it didn't inconvenience her too much, and when it did she would simply cry. She was rather easily injured, and when her feelings were hurt she was apt to lose her temper and to burst into tears. But Mildred, even when she cried, was sweet. Sweetness was an inherent quality in her.

She finished hooking her pale green crêpe dress, helped her mother squeeze full shoulders into a net that was too tight, and arm in arm, like two sisters (as Mrs. Fahnstock fondly imagined), they went down to dinner.

The Mawosta was a house that went in for an elaborate menu and very little to eat. They favored the "à la" method, which meant that if you ordered *Boeuf garni de choux* you were rewarded with a small portion of corned beef and cabbage, the cabbage arranged decoratively in the shape of roses.

Mildred, after a long but unsubstantial meal, wandered disconsolately down the long hallway between the dining-room and the office. Mawosta in May and June was hopeless enough in the daytime, but the evenings were without end. A group of girls called out to her as she entered the office. They had formed a circle in one corner of the room and were knitting frantically on sweaters which looked, half-finished, as though they were being made to fit kangaroos. Milly eyed her contemporaries appraisingly. Not much competition here,

if there were only something to compete for. They were as unattractive a crowd as one usually finds at a summer hotel. She had met most of them at Mawosta two years before.

"Get your work and join us, Milly," one of the girls suggested.

Milly fingered one of the sweaters listlessly. "Haven't got any work. Pretty color. Shetland or Iceland?"

"Iceland. Nobody uses Shetland any more."

A pause. Milly yawned.

"I've got to go and make a kick. See you later."

She threaded her way between the little clusters of middle-aged men who were earnestly talking golf, over to the desk. It was then that she caught her breath, and her bounding heart played hop-scotch, for her gaze met the deep gray eyes of the most beautiful youth she had ever seen.

He was on the other side of the desk and he was making out a bill, or he had been so occupied until he spied Mildred. Proof conclusive that he was a clerk—but what a clerk!

Mildred let one of her soft hands wander aimlessly to her yellow hair in a mannerism that she had, one which she knew was effective. She was thrilled but she felt no embarrassment; her sensations perhaps best resembled those of a bloodhound whose leash has been suddenly cut.

She smiled a trifle shyly and lowered her long lashes before beginning: "I'm Miss Fahnstock, you

know . . . suite 148. I'm awfully sorry but there seems to be something the matter with the water in our bathtub. It runs all the time, you know. I guess it leaks, or something. Would it be too much trouble . . . could you . . . ?"

Her voice was like honey dripping through silk. It was as if she had said: "I think you are the most wonderful thing I ever saw in my life. I'm saying all this foolishness about the bathtub because I can't very well tell you the truth. But oh, just give me a chance to know you a little better and I'll . . ."

The beautiful young man blushed, and Mildred instantly put him down as inexperienced.

"I'll see to it at once," he said soberly.

"Thank you," Mildred cooed.

That ended their first interview. Her spirits had risen perceptibly.

3

Mildred was not one to let the affair drop there. By dint of subtle questioning she found out from the other girls something of the young man's history.

His name, it seemed, was Henry Tadd, and he was the son of a neighboring farmer, who had recently died. He was endeavoring, by clerking in the summer, to start himself in at Columbia, which college he intended to enter the following fall. All of the girls agreed that he was good to look upon

but "cold as a float." And Mildred understood by this that Tadd had no money, which made him doubly romantic, and that no one else had succeeded in arousing his interest in the slightest degree, which only added zest to her own determination to awaken him from that unresponsive lethargy.

Since she had a clear field, things went rather smoothly for her. Mrs. Fahnstock spent her days in successive rounds of bridge, and rarely saw her daughter except at meal-times and when they were dressing. The other girls at the hotel played tennis and swam, but Mildred wasn't athletic, so she sat on the porch instead and read *Smart Set* and *Vanity Fair*. She was careful to choose a chair beside a window which offered a view of the office, and more particularly the desk.

Then, too, it was surprising how many questions popped into her head that she must ask the clerk: what hours the billiard room was open, whether there was an extra charge for meals in one's room, how far it was to Tenbrook Mountain. And the hotel register, which always lay on the desk, held a strange interest for her; she would pore over it.

Late one afternoon, less than a week after her arrival at Mawosta, Mildred wandered down to the boat-wharf. It was hot, and the office for the past two hours had been deserted. There was just time for a paddle around the lake in her canoe before dinner.

She picked her way gingerly along the boards of

the wharf in order that her white buckskin sport-shoes might remain unsullied. Her complexion, set off by flesh-pink sweater and skirt, seemed more childlike than ever, her upper lip more protruding. She was inclined to feel extremely sorry for herself; she was unmercifully bored.

The canoe lay at one end of the dock, turned "turtle" for self-protection against the rains. Mildred bent over, tugged at it, moved it a bit, tugged again.

"Pardon me, Miss Fahnstock, may I ——?"

She looked up, startled; she had really thought the dock empty. But it was Henry Tadd in bathing outfit, horribly embarrassed and dripping with water. His beautiful gray eyes took her in with a fleet, admiring glance.

"Can't I—help you?"

She stepped back daintily, to avoid being splashed, and her hand fluttered to her hair. She gave just the right impression of feminine dependence, of appealing helplessness, in her voice:

"Oh, thanks. It *is* awfully heavy. . . ."

He leaned over, with a slow litheness, and lifting the boat without effort swung it out on the water. He was a sleek young savage; well-shaped head splendidly poised on strong, brown neck. His loose-set physique was of the sort that finds itself at ease on the athletic field.

"Not very hard for *you,* is it?"

This, of course, was fearfully crude, but Mildred

knew how far she could go. He forced a laugh that, nevertheless, was pleased, and extended his hand to help her into the canoe.

"Oh, well, a man ——" he replied lamely. "It's different for a girl!"

She sank back in the canoe chair and reached for the paddle. Her sleeves, rolled high, showed the pretty softness of dimpled elbows. She looked up at him and half-pouted, half-smiled.

He was certainly uncommonly good-looking. She couldn't help comparing him with George, as he stood there. George would have been so stodgy in a bathing suit. For there was nothing of the young Greek about George.

"Now give me a big, strong—very strong push!" she ordered.

Swiftly the boat shot forward, out toward the middle of the lake, on and on, the water smacking its slim sides with loud, wet kisses. When finally it slowed down, Mildred began dipping her paddle lazily, guiding the craft toward a nook on the shady side. She had heard a splash behind, so she didn't bother to look back; she knew well enough that Henry Tadd was swimming after her. Instead she moored the canoe on a rock beneath a low-hanging tree, and taking a magazine that she had brought along with her, she busily pretended to read.

He swam up, presently, and climbed, panting, on a rock near by. Mildred was all surprise. She

closed her book and bent forward, her plump arms bound about her knees.

"My, what a long, long swim!—but how nice of you to come way out here just to amuse me! I guess you knew I was going to be awfully lonesome all by myself!"

Most boys, and even some men, are much like frightened puppies; they are so anxious to be friendly, yet they back away at the touch of a hand. Tadd gave a rather simple smile in answer to her exclamations, and he looked as though he wished very much to dive back into the water again. Mildred saw that she must draw him out gently, not too fast.

She searched about for some topic of conversation that might lead, later, to personalities and yet would sound safe for the present.

"I think it's just lovely out on the lake, don't you?" she babbled. "It's so much cooler than it is up in that hot, stuffy old hotel with all those hot, stuffy old people sitting around. And those awful girls. They like to knit all the time, or else play tennis. I don't like to knit, and tennis is so strenuous. I like to get out here with a book, or some one person to talk to, and just sort of rest, don't you?"

"Well, I don't get very much chance," he replied. "One afternoon a week—and evenings."

"Yes, that's right," she agreed. "You do have to work awfully hard, don't you? It must be awful

to make out bills and things all day long without anyone to talk to, or anything. I think I'd go crazy. But then, I suppose you get letters and all that, from home, so it isn't so bad."

He smiled a bit ruefully. "No, not many letters. There aren't many people to write."

She had made the correct conjecture, and here was her cue. Her pretty mouth drooped.

"Oh . . . poor boy. And I said *I* was lonesome!"

She was so innocently lovely, so sweet in her sympathy for him, that for the moment Henry Tadd apparently forgot his embarrassment. He started in to tell her of his life at home, of the work he was going to do at Columbia, of his ambitions for the future. When he finished, the sun had sunk behind the far edge of the mountains, leaving the lake a crimson bath. Mildred had been an unusually good listener; she had enjoyed watching him as he talked.

Later, as they parted on the dock, she turned her eyes wistfully to his, which were so beautiful, and gray, and so very sober.

"It's been awfully nice—knowing you like this" —she consciously faltered—"does it have to end ——? Couldn't we ——?"

"I'm free in the evenings," he answered eagerly. "If you would ——?"

And so it was arranged that they should meet every night at the wharf. . . . There

was a full moon that week, Mildred happened to know.

4

In all probability, Mildred would have simply regarded this as one of her least interesting flirtations if it hadn't been that just then she had quite a violent quarrel with her mother. Mrs. Fahnstock alternated between petting Mildred outrageously and finding fault with her for being selfish and spoiled. This time the mother's losses at bridge were the indirect cause of the quarrel; Mildred in tears, the effect.

That evening, much crushed, yet with the sense, delightful to all youth, of being misunderstood and unappreciated, Milly stole down to the boat-wharf to keep her tryst with Henry Tadd.

Henry was a queer boy: that was Mildred's opinion of him after a week of such meetings. It was plain to be seen that he hadn't known many girls, or he wouldn't have treated her as he did. He seemed to think she was a sort of angel or a goddess or something. Of course, that respect, that almost reverence of his was nice, but after all, it was rather silly. Mildred wanted people to show more tangibly that they liked her. And he was slow!

She found him waiting at the dock for her. Something in the beauty of his figure against the moonlit lake, something eerie in the deserted boathouse and the sound of the slapping water, appealed to her instinct of the drama.

She stretched out one arm toward him in a little, pleading gesture; her other hand was at her hair. "Oh, Henry. I'm in such trouble."

"Trouble?" He led her to a rustic bench by the water's edge. "Come, sit down and tell me ——"

They seated themselves, Mildred well toward the middle of the bench, Henry squeezing into as small a space as possible at one end. She dabbed at her eyes with a frilly square of pink crepe de chine.

"It's Mother . . . oh, Henry!" her voice broke. "I can't stand it any longer."

She was altogether pathetic in this rôle, fearfully woebegone, fearfully pretty. Henry moved away still farther.

"Tell me," he said huskily, "tell me all about it."

She commenced the tale of the quarrel in her sweet, choked voice. Her imagination dramatized it, making it a gigantic affair of parental cruelty and abuse, as she continued.

"It's—it's just awful," she finished. "I don't know how I can go on. I'm—I'm so unhappy. . . ."

Her lovely face, upturned to his, was hallowed in the pale light; her eyes, still tearful; her sad, half-pouting mouth.

"If there were only something I could do," he said miserably. "You know I'd—well, I'd die for you, Milly. I believe I would. And I'd marry you

this minute and take you away where you'd be happy again if only ——"

He stopped awkwardly, his thought broken. Milly was looking at him with a curious interest, a sort of surprised wonder.

Strange that she hadn't thought of him in connection with marriage before this. The idea hit her now with a terrific force. He was so much better looking than George Warbridge. It would be lovely to have a really handsome husband! And her mother would never forgive herself. . . . Milly chuckled inwardly.

"You'd marry me if what ——?" she asked softly.

He shrugged. "Oh, if I had any money and if I'd finished college. But I can't. I haven't anything."

Mildred drew away. "If you loved me you'd make me marry you in spite of everything. You'd give up college and get a job and take care of me. You wouldn't ever let people treat me like this—not if you loved me."

"Milly, I do—I do!"

She had him fast, then, as any dumb animal in a trap. He put fumbling hands on her shoulders and kissed her on one soft cheek, tenderly, as in sanctification.

Mildred grimaced. "Oh, not like that! This way ——" She lifted her full lips and one plump white arm slid about his neck. When, finally, she

let him release her, his calm gray eyes were dazed, but starry.

"What fun!" she chattered. "We'll go down to Melrose this very night and get a license and be married right away—you can in Pennsylvania, you know. 'Mrs. Henry Tadd'—doesn't that sound queer?"

It would be a frightful shock to Mrs. Fahnstock, Mildred liked the idea immensely. And the other girls—wouldn't Vera and Angela open their eyes? Yes, and that horrid old George Warbridge, too! Life was certainly exciting, after all.

5

In the station at Melrose, Henry and Mildred Tadd awaited the Philadelphia Express. From the hotel they had walked to town, a distance of two miles, had secured a license, and had raced through the wedding ceremony, hardly knowing a word of what they said, in their anxiety to catch the train to the city. Now, with fifteen minutes' leeway, they betook themselves to the waiting-room, to an inconspicuous corner.

Mildred was tired, but still pleasantly excited, still talkative.

"I think Philadelphia is a lovely place to go for a honeymoon. I've been there before, oh, several times. The Bellevue-Stratford is nice—we'll go right there. They have dancing, you know—a marvellous orchestra."

Henry looked at her soberly; he had grown very quiet. "We can't go there, Milly. We ——"

"Philadelphia *Ex*press! All aboard for Philadelphia!"

They rose with the crowd, then made their way out to the train. Mildred started forward, toward the engine.

"Here we are!" Henry called out. "This is all right."

Mildred turned about. "But the Pullmans ——"

"We go in the day-coach."

"Oh."

Her face fell and she followed him submissively. Once they were settled, she brightened. "It isn't so bad, as long as you couldn't get parlor-car seats so late. It's rather a lark."

The train had started; Mildred put her hands up to the window to shield her eyes from the light, and peered out. Wide, dark fields and farmhouses, a dizzy succession of ink-black trees. She turned back to the lighted car and dropped her hands in her lap. Henry's seal ring hung loosely on her left third finger; she must get a real wedding-ring in Philadelphia, engraved platinum or platinum with diamonds would be the thing.

She slipped her arm through Henry's and smiled up at him.

"What hotel shall we go to? Don't you like the Bellevue? Where are you going to take me?"

He pulled a small book from his pocket, and a pencil. The book was filled with figures. "I don't know," he answered. "We'll ask the Travellers' Aid when we get to Philadelphia. They'll tell us a good, reasonable place to go. The Bellevue is way beyond us—we can't afford it."

Milly laughed. "We'll charge it to Father. He pays all my bills—if that's the reason."

"No, we won't!" His decisiveness was almost rude. He added more gently: "You must remember that I'm supporting you now."

He pulled his arm away and anxiously began to add a column of figures in his little book. Mildred's mouth drew down at the corners; she didn't speak to him again until they reached Philadelphia.

In the station he left Mildred to make his inquiries of the Travellers' Aid. He came back presently, and together they found their way to the street.

"There's a taxi," Milly said as they reached the curb, and she started to signal the chauffeur, but he stayed her hand.

"Not for us! You don't seem to realize ——!"

Realize! Didn't she though! With a hurt look she refused his aid as she boarded the trolley.

The trolley . . . en route to a cheap boarding-house. . . . Was this, indeed, Romance? . . . Mildred wanted to cry.

CHAPTER II

1

HENRY had a serious talk with his young wife on the day after their elopement. It was somewhat difficult to explain matters to her, he found. She did distracting things to her hair with those soft, small hands while he was speaking, and her eyes wandered about the cheap boarding-house room with a distasteful glance that added to his uneasiness. But he bravely told her that her new life must necessarily be quite different, that he had no money, and that they would have to struggle together to breast the tide of adversity.

His talk was candid, and sincere, and trite; it bored Mildred and made her fidget. When he finished she suggested, with sudden enthusiasm, that she go back to her parents for the time being. Wasn't that a good idea? Of course she would come back to him later, after he had earned enough to make things easier for them. It was to be expected that her mother would be most disagreeable, but Milly was even willing to face her now.

Henry's honest, handsome face fell at that proposal. "But, darling, marriage is sacred. You couldn't leave me when you've promised to remain 'in sickness, in sorrow,' 'for richer, for poorer'—

when—when we love each other. It—it won't be so hard when we care—so much!"

She relented, then. He seemed fearfully unhappy at the thought of being without her; it was flattering. And besides, she knew well enough that her father would help them out financially. It was only a matter of a short time.

For Henry was really quite madly, quite desperately in love with her, or at least with the image that he thought was she. The son of plain, simple farmer people, who had shown him the difference between right and wrong in no uncertain terms, he took life seriously and his code was without complications. He believed that fairness and diligence won out, and he believed in being kind. He was the sort of person who is instinctively good from childhood, and he saw good in everything, even when it wasn't there. To him Mildred typified all that was lovely and delicate and helpless. Her light-heartedness he attributed to her youth; she was only seventeen, two years his junior. And he hoped to be able to make her see his way of looking at things as time went on.

That first day in Philadelphia they both really enjoyed. Once Henry's sermon was over, they discarded the seriousness of their outlook in the future, and threw themselves whole-heartedly and with a sort of innocent abandon into the pleasures of honeymooning. There is something rather intoxicating in the mere fact of being a bride, and

Milly felt a certain elated satisfaction simply because she was registered at the boarding-house as "Mrs. Henry Tadd" and not just as plain "Miss Mildred Fahnstock." The former title sounded so much more worldly-wise, so much more mature and sophisticated.

They walked down Chestnut Street, after breakfast, in search of a jeweller's shop. There was to be a wedding-ring, of course. Henry's seal ring wouldn't do, even though they were in such excessively modest circumstances.

In the main aisle of the store that they had finally decided to enter, a bland middle-aged gentleman with a white button-holer accosted them.

"Something in silverware?"

Henry flushed. "Er—no. Something in—jewelry."

The floor-walker bowed ceremoniously and directed them to a side counter, turning them over to a spruce young clerk.

Milly smiled up at him. "We want to get a wedding-ring."

There was no timidity in her attitude. Henry might blush if he liked, but she was perfectly capable of carrying off the situation.

The clerk opened the showcase and laid out a tray of sparkling circlets on the counter. Milly's dull blue suit, an "import" from Gray's in New York, hadn't remained unobserved.

"How lovely! Aren't they pretty, Henry?"

She took one of the rings and slipped it on her finger, holding it off to get the effect at a short distance. Henry, meanwhile, had picked up another and was examining the price tag.

"I'm sorry. I'm afraid these won't do. Haven't you something less expensive?"

The young clerk's eyebrows raised. "Perhaps plain platinum?"

"Yes, or even—gold."

"Well, but Henry, this is just what I want. I like it and—and ——" She broke off. A surreptitious nudge from Henry had stopped her.

What was the matter with him, anyway? Didn't he know that her father would be glad to give her all the jewelry she wanted? If Henry couldn't buy her a decent ring, at least he could let that be a wedding gift from her own family.

Still, it was fun to buy such things! Perhaps she could pretend to agree with Henry just for now, then later when Mr. Fahnstock gave them some money they could do this all again.

The clerk had laid out a new tray filled with narrow gold bands. Milly bent her pink face over them, selected one that was delicately hand-wrought in a design of orange-blossoms.

"This one, Henry—I rather like that, don't you?"

He caught at it eagerly, glanced at the tag. "Does it suit you, really? Will it be all right?"

She put it on, twisting it about on her plump

digit. What was the use of being unpleasant, today of all days? It only meant wearing the silly thing for a short period until she bought one that she really liked.

"Yes. It's just what I want." She glanced up sweetly.

Later, when they were out in the street again, Henry had her soft hand with the gold ring tight in his overcoat pocket, and clasped in his own. The misgivings that he had experienced earlier in the day had miraculously flown. Milly was so reasonable! He was confident that everything in the future would be all right.

2

The members of Mildred's family, learning the news of her marriage, reacted in different ways.

Mrs. Fahnstock fainted when she received Henry's telegram from Philadelphia and later went off into violent hysterics, thereby causing much pleasurable excitement among the guests at Mawosta.

A long distance call interrupted Malcolm in the midst of a tennis set at Southampton. He listened impatiently to his mother's sobbing voice over the wire, as she told him of Mildred's elopement. When she finished he cried: "But, Holy Mackerel, Mother, couldn't you have telegraphed? It was five-all and my 'ad,' you know." He went back to the courts sadly; his game was completely spoiled.

It was for Mr. Fahnstock to pursue the runaway couple.

F. Gordon Fahnstock. Big and purple and immaculate. The sort of man one would expect to find a tyrant in his home. As a matter of fact he had, at first, tried very hard to be a tyrant, tried and failed. Mrs. Fahnstock could whine more persistently than he could roar. So he had folded his tents and withdrawn to the seclusion of a large leather chair in one of the Fifth Avenue windows of the Union League. He confined his autocracy to his business and to infrequent outbursts occasioned by his children. He had been furious when Malcolm was expelled from Groton; he had insisted upon Mildred's graduation. He could still work himself into an apoplectic frenzy when an opportunity arose, but it was an effort. He was growing older; kindliness had laid sweet, cool fingers on his hot brow.

He had succeeded in making himself exceedingly angry over Mildred's elopement. Now, as he stood in the doorway of the "good, reasonable hotel" which Henry had chosen, one determination was prevalent. He would take Mildred back to New York with him that afternoon, and he would have her marriage annulled as soon as possible.

"Mr. Henry Tadd. I wish to see him immediately."

The proprietor looked up from a book in which he had been writing. "Name?"

Mr. Fahnstock scowled. "No matter. Just tell him that a gentleman wishes to see him on important business."

The proprietor bowed, and signalled to a lone colored bell-boy who was reading the sporting news in one corner of the lobby.

"Tell Mr. Tadd to come down." He turned to his new guest. "You can go in the parlor and sit, if you want to."

Gingerly Mr. Fahnstock seated himself on one of the rose plush parlor chairs. The place, on the whole, looked clean enough, still one couldn't be sure. He glanced about the room curiously. Pale green wall paper with pink flowers badly faded, much black walnut and plush, much embellished bric-à-brac. Mr. Fahnstock was still angry, but his large mouth twitched. It *was* funny to find Milly in a place like this.

"Oh, Daddy—darling!"

It was Mildred, all aflutter, and pretty and pink and appealing. She put soft arms about her father's neck and kissed one of his heavy cheeks. But he stood up and shook her off rather impatiently; he was very warm. Then he noticed Henry.

"Mr. Tadd, I presume," he remarked drily.

Henry bowed in acquiescence. "Yes, sir. And —I suppose you're Mr. Fahnstock."

"Quite so."

Mildred glanced from her father to her husband, pleasantly expectant.

Henry was meeting Mr. Fahnstock's eyes squarely, honestly, and the older man instantly liked that look in spite of himself. He had been a capable judge of young men in a business way for thirty years; Tadd might not be brilliant, but he would be reliable, or Fahnstock was a fool.

"Young man, you've committed a very serious offense." He forced his bruskness now. "I shall take Mildred away with me at once. The marriage will be annulled."

Henry reddened. "You can't do that, sir. I'll fight you. She wasn't happy with you. You can't take her away." The boy put one arm about Mildred and drew her close.

Mr. Fahnstock mopped his brow. "It's very hot. If you could omit the—er—could you?"

Henry flushed again, and he and Mildred separated.

Mr. Fahnstock sank down wearily in his chair, his purplish face more puzzled than angry. The marvel to him was what such a young fellow as Henry Tadd could possibly see in Mildred. And instead of holding to his purpose to break up the match, he began to think that Mildred, after all, had done rather well—far better than he would have expected her to do.

"Suppose—suppose I let you keep Mildred. Could you support her?"

Henry shrugged. "Of course not in the way that

you've supported her, but I can make her happy. I can find work, and we'll manage."

"And if I found an opening for you in my place, I don't suppose you'd object." Mr. Fahnstock's tone was dry again.

"I most certainly would, sir." Henry was genuinely indignant. "I don't intend to have anyone say that I married 'on' the Fahnstock family!"

Mildred broke in: "Oh, Henry! How silly—let Daddy help you!"

"No. He's right, Milly. But who'd have thought ——" Fahnstock stopped. Suddenly he held out his hand to the boy. "Son, you're all right. You don't need any help. And I'm going to entrust Mildred to your care, after all. But—but at least you'll let me give you a letter of introduction to some other firm?"

His somewhat humble friendliness was in ludicrous contrast to the blustering beginning he had made. But Henry didn't seem to see the humor of it. "Thanks," he said soberly. "I'd appreciate it awfully."

Milly chattered: "Now, isn't that nice? Henry'll get a big, wonderful job and we'll be rich. Daddy, stay for dinner, will you? The food is dreadful here, but we could go over to the Ritz."

Mr. Fahnstock rose, took his thin platinum and gold watch from the pocket of his tight waistcoat. "No, I'll catch the next train for New York. I've twenty minutes to make it."

He shook hands with Henry and started hurriedly out, Mildred clinging to his arm. Outside, his taxi was still waiting and he was about to jump in when she detained him with a gentle tug.

"Daddy, darling," she murmured. "Aren't you going to kiss your only daughter good-bye?"

He looked down, frowning, into the lovely face upturned to his. Then he put his hand again in his pocket and brought out a roll of bills. "Here you are. I suppose that's what you want."

"Oh, thanks! You old dear Daddy!"

She waved farewell prettily as he drove off, then tucking the roll carefully out of sight in the neck of her dress, she went inside. Henry was waiting for her by the stairway.

"Isn't my Daddy just the darlingest old thing?" she demanded.

3

Within a few days George Warbridge received a letter. It was written in a small, round, childlike hand:

"Perhaps it will surprise you to hear from me. Of course I suppose you have read all about my marriage in the papers, there has been such a lot of notoriety and everything.

"But that's the way it is, George, when Love comes. You just get swept away and you don't know what you are doing. But if anyone had told me the night before I left for Mawosta that I'd be married to Henry Tadd now—why I'd have laughed!

"You have always been a good friend, George, and I hope you always will be. I'm sorry we had that silly quarrel. I know I must have made you feel awfully, treating you the way I did. Will you forgive me?

"MILLY."

It would be hard to represent the true state of George's sensibilities since he had heard of the Fahnstock-Tadd elopement. After that evening when he and Mildred had so unfortunately fallen out, he had felt, frankly, like an unconscionable cad.

He was fond of Milly. She was pretty, and a good dancer, and popular. All the other fellows went more or less regularly with certain girls in their own set, and George needed a girl. Milly served admirably.

What if she had put things so that he had been forced to go and see her two and three times a week or else seem rude or brutal? He didn't mind seeing her; he even rather enjoyed it. And he ought not to have accused her of having taken the affair too much into her own hands. He couldn't forgive himself for that, even though she had actually wrung the impeachment from him.

But in George Warbridge's life there was a girl. He worshipped her at a safe distance; he was mortally afraid of her. She was the one whom he wanted to take with him to dances and parties, not Milly. A score of times he had gone to the tele-

phone to ask her to see a play with him, or to attend a college "prom." He always ended by calling Mildred, and he sent her the flowers that he really wanted Angela Day to have.

Lately, his flirtation with Milly had gone to lengths that he hadn't intended it to reach. He was rather alarmed at the turn things had taken. Mildred was one who manipulated her affairs with a sureness of touch that was inescapable. He regretted his behavior on the evening of the quarrel, yet he almost welcomed the estrangement.

So now, Milly was married! And he, George Warbridge, was free again, free from any suspicion of an entanglement. He reread her note:

"That's the way it is, George, when Love comes. You just get swept away and you don't know what you are doing. . . ."

He shook his head slowly. That wasn't the way it was with him. Love came, and its shining splendor struck him dumb; it beckoned from the stars, and his hesitating feet were caught in the clay of the earth.

At his desk he composed a short, congratulatory letter to Mildred. He was so thoroughly glad that she had realized her happiness. But then, she deserved it: she was willing to go after what she wanted in life, she wasn't afraid!

The telephone, at his elbow, tempted him. Why not ring up Angela, just as any old friend might do, ask her to go to one of the hotel roofs, that even-

ing? Lenox 27485 . . . he knew the number by heart, though he hadn't called it since she had put up her hair and become a "young lady."

But the sound of her voice on the wire—the very thought of it made George quake. He would probably stammer and make a general ass of himself; she would think him a greater fool than ever.

No. Presently Angela was going out to the coast, for a pleasure trip. He would wait until she had gone, then he'd write to her. Writing wasn't quite so hard, and there was no danger of losing one's head in the middle of a sentence. He could sound sensible, and sane, and matter-of-fact, in a letter.

He didn't realize that by the time that he actually sent the note, his news would be most astonishingly different. He started on a first draft immediately. He wanted to be sure that he put himself in as favorable a light as possible.

4

Henry found a flat in the Bronx, convenient to the subway line. Mr. Fahnstock's letter of introduction had brought results: Henry had secured a clerical position in the office of a soap manufacturing company on Warren Street. His salary was small, but his hopes were high. He liked his employer, and it looked as though there would be an opportunity for advancement shortly.

Mildred, of course, was horrified at the idea of living in the Bronx. She wrote to her chums,

Angela and Vera, and told them to continue addressing her at her old home—that she and Henry hadn't settled definitely on an apartment, as yet. She hadn't written before, but she had had a gift, accompanied by a card of congratulation from Siam, Ohio, where Vera was with her parents, and she had heard frequently from Angela, who was travelling in the west with her grandmother. Mildred simply couldn't have them know that her present address was the Bronx. And perhaps by the time they returned to the city she and Henry would have moved to a more fashionable neighborhood.

She received a prompt reply from Angela:

"What a cunning little bride you must be, Milly. I can picture you searching Park Avenue for an apartment that just exactly suits, with that serious, oh-so-business-like expression that you have sometimes. And then the breakfast-room wouldn't get the morning sun, or something equally terrible, so that you couldn't possibly consider that particular apartment, you know. . . . Oh, it's a thrilling life, isn't it?

"But it seems especially thrilling when one reads the papers, these days. Belgium occupied, the Germans marching on Paris. I wonder when it will be our turn to come in and try our hand at giving the Bosch a run for his money. It almost looks as though it already had been our turn and that we'd passed it up.

"Los Angeles is a heavenly place, Milly. If you and Henry hadn't already honeymooned, I'd suggest that you come out here *tout de suite.* I, less

sentimentally inclined, plan to return one fine day and write. The inspiration of the southern skies, you know, and all that sort of thing. Grandmother adores the place. She tears about like a young colt on a fall day. She wears me out, trying to keep up with her. Heaven knows when we'll be back—that is, unless there's war. It's dreadful to say, but I hope there will be. I'm sick of this everlasting 'watchful waiting'—it's exasperating as well as humiliating. . . ."

Mildred sighed as she folded the letter. It had come on the late mail just as she was busying herself with dinner. Now she glanced about the untidy kitchen poutingly . . . her breakfast room! She lifted a heavy pan full of water and peeled potatoes, with her rubber-gloved hands, setting it jarringly on the rusty stove.

She hadn't started early enough to prepare the meal; it would be late, the potatoes would be half-cooked, the meat tough. That kitchen, with the breakfast and luncheon dishes piled, unwashed, on the tubs, the soft wood floor that was splintering—how she hated it!

She wondered, as she did at this time every evening, why it was that she remained with Henry. Even though her mother was still angry and had refused to see her, Mildred knew that if she returned home she would be forgiven. No, it was simply her kind heart that kept her; Henry would miss her so, if she went. For she had grown to care, in her way, for Henry. He spoiled her ap-

pallingly. The future looked brighter, certainly. She would hang on a trifle longer and avoid a break; she so disliked disagreeable scenes.

She went out into the tiny parlor that was strewn with newspapers. Stale ashes from Henry's pipe were unemptied, in a tray on the mission table. It seemed to Mildred as though she had spent all day cleaning house, yet nothing was tidy. She was too tired to do more now; she crossed to the window.

The Catholic Church across the street was pouring forth crowds from every doorway, and Mildred suddenly remembered that it was Good Friday . . . Good Friday . . . that brought recollections. . . . When she was fifteen she had fallen in love with one of the choir boys at St. Matthew's. He had looked so handsome in his black robe on Good Friday. . . .

The sound of a newsboy crying an extra and the sight of Henry coming down the street, brought her back. Henry waved to her without smiling and climbed the steps of the stoop wearily. He was looking older lately; she thought it became him.

She faced about as he entered the room, and she ran to meet him.

"Oh, Henry, I ——"

He stopped her with a sober gesture and held up his newspaper for her to read.

WAR DECLARED!!! WAR DECLARED!!!
WAR DECLARED!!!

Her baby voice read the words of the headline falteringly. They didn't mean much to her. But Henry's grim face frightened her terribly. Suddenly she began to cry.

5

But when Henry explained the situation to Mildred, she felt much better. If he went to war she would be able to return to her parents, with his consent. He would look splendid in a uniform; she would be awfully proud of him. And Henry assured her that the percentage of casualties would be so small.

Then something happened that made her decide quite definitely that Henry must stay at home. Two days after war was declared the man just above Tadd, in his office, enlisted. That left a better position open for Henry.

"Oh, darling—it's your chance!" Mildred cried when he told her the news. "It's what we've been waiting for! Isn't it just lovely? Of course you can step right into his place and ——"

Henry passed his hand back over his forehead, and frowned. "But I've got to go, too. I can't stay home and take his job while he goes out and gets killed for me. That's what it amounts to."

Mildred pouted. "You don't think very much of me, do you? You don't care how lonely and sad I'll be all alone. No . . . you think of yourself—and—and the glory that you'll get."

She looked very miserable and pathetic and childlike as she sat curled up in one of the stiff mission chairs. Her head bent forward on her arms showed the stray yellow curls at the back of her neck. After all, he had married her, had promised to care for her—and she was so helpless! He cleared his throat gruffly and changed the subject. He felt that he would be willing to do almost anything then, to make her happy. But he couldn't be a slacker . . . he couldn't. . . .

One day Malcolm came to see them. He hadn't called before, he probably wouldn't have come then but for the fact that he was down from Plattsburg, filled with excitement over his new uniform, which he wanted to show his sister.

Henry, who met him for the first time, sized Malcolm up as a typical New York millionaire's son: spoiled, sophisticated, frivolous. Yet there was something lovable in him as there was in Mildred. He looked remarkably well in khaki; Henry noted that his uniform was that of an infantry lieutenant.

"Well, what do you think of it? Pretty doggy, eh?" Malcolm swung about the better to display his new magnificence.

But Milly wasn't enthusiastic. She glanced at Henry uneasily. "It's all right, Mal. But you're too thin for tight fitting things. You look like some sort of a long brown bug, or something."

They hadn't spoken of the war, not since that

evening when Tadd had reported the news of his superior's enlistment. But Henry had been secretly investigating different branches of the service; he hadn't given up the hope of convincing Mildred that he ought to go. He was sure that she would see it as he did.

With that end in view he began to question Malcolm about his regiment, his company, his officers. But as Henry became the more interested, Mildred grew equally bored. She was bored, and yet she was vaguely worried. She tried several times to break into the conversation with some flippant remark, but she received no attention. Malcolm, his young face glowing with unwonted enthusiasm, was giving a detailed description of his camp while Henry listened like one entranced.

She was relieved and thankful when at last they were rid of Malcolm. She was so anxious to bring things back to the commonplace. She perched on the arm of Henry's chair and pulled his necktie straight. "Funny old thing," she murmured. "Can't even tie your cravat without me, can you?"

"No,"—he captured one of her hands and patted it gently. "I'm going to miss you, Milly, terribly."

Mildred pulled away. "Miss me?" Her plump pink features were drawn with alarm. "Henry—what do you mean? I—oh ——"

She broke off with a moan and quick tears filled

her eyes and ran down her round cheeks. "Henry —I—couldn't—I ——"

Everything was wrong: this awful war, Henry would lose his one opportunity for advancement, they would remain poor—live in the Bronx forever! She rocked back and forth and sobbed.

"I can't—stand it—I—can't—oooooh ——"

She was half-laughing, half-crying now. Mrs. Fahnstock had often had hysterics; Mildred hadn't realized before what a comfort it was. She gave herself up completely to an orgy of sobs and shrieks. Henry ran for water, bathed her forehead, his solemn face white with fear.

"Darling, stop! I'll do anything if you'll stop!"

She grew calmer by degrees though she still wept copiously. "Promise me—promise me ——" she faltered.

Henry gave her a distracted look. "I promise you. I won't do anything to make you unhappy. I promise."

He turned suddenly and went out to the kitchen. He wanted to be alone. Now that she was quiet he could leave her. He covered his face with his two hands and a feeling of utter disappointment, of shame, suffused him. "Oh, Women!" he muttered. "These Women!"

CHAPTER III

1

MILDRED'S baby was born the following summer. She thought it a pity that the arrival came so soon, but she was glad in a way, because she had begun to worry about the draft. There was no doubt that Henry was safe now; if necessary she could put things before the conscription board in such a manner that they couldn't possibly take him away from her.

Henry had changed a good deal lately; in some ways she thought he had improved. He had always been wonderful looking, and he was that, now, as much as before. But though he had never erred on the side of vivacity, recently his quietness had increased. He talked less and he moralized very little, which, all in all, was a comfort. Since his promotion in business he had become far more serious. He rarely laughed. It was natural, however, that his new responsibilities should weigh upon him.

There was something pathetic, something almost profane in Mildred's maternity. She was so young, and she took it so lightly. She offered no joyous Magnificat at the birth of her son; she regarded her motherhood as a matter of course. People got

married and then they had children, that was all. The question of a divine commission never entered her blonde head.

Mrs. Fahnstock came to see her daughter for the first time when the baby was six weeks old. She hadn't communicated with Milly since her marriage, and the news of the child's advent had made her doubly furious. She had no desire to be a grandmother at forty-three. But then curiosity overcame her; she forgot all anger in the anxiety to see the new Henry Tadd.

She appeared at Mildred's door one day without previous announcement.

"You're an ungrateful girl, or you would have come to me and apologized for leaving me the way you did. I nearly had a nervous breakdown as a result. You don't love me!"

All this, in the hallway, while Milly stood on the threshold of the flat in a pink apron, with a dishcloth over her arm.

"Mother! I never supposed it was you! Come in. I want you to see the baby."

Mildred took her mother's hand and drew her inside. Mrs. Fahnstock's clothes, from shoes to hat, were new to her daughter. They were too youthful for her as usual, but they were charming, and they must have cost a great deal. Milly eyed them greedily.

Mrs. Fahnstock, meanwhile, was squinting about the apartment, as Mildred led her in. She was

near-sighted but she refused to use a lorgnette. She thought one would make her look older.

"What a funny place! Milly, you poor child!"

It was pleasant to be pitied. Mildred sighed. "There's the baby. Don't you want to see him?"

Mrs. Fahnstock crossed to the crib and peered in. "Well, um was a tweetest sing!" she drawled as she bent over the child. "Why don't you keep his clothes cleaner, darling? He looks so untidy."

"I can't help it," Milly retorted. "I wash and scrub and wash all day, I declare I do. It's easy enough for you to criticize. It's different when you have a house full of servants and everything."

Mrs. Fahnstock shook her head and her soft, vermilion cheeks wobbled. She had intrusted both Malcolm and Mildred to the care of nurses and governesses until they were fully grown. She was an experienced mother; she knew how children should be brought up. She dilated on the subject.

"Oh, yes, I know all that," Milly said crossly when her mother finally paused for breath. "But I tell you it takes money to raise children in the right way, and we haven't any money. Even with Henry in his new position—why, I haven't a thing—and it's like squeezing blood from a stone to get a dollar out of Henry, anyway. Oh, Mother, you don't know—you've never suffered like this!"

She was a lovely young martyr, and her mother's red lips quivered sympathetically.

"Poor darling!"

For an hour they talked, Milly confiding all her woes to Mrs. Fahnstock's highly inquisitive ears. But these mission chairs were really so uncomfortable, and the untidy room got on her nerves. She finally rose to go.

"I'll just leave a little something to help along" (she emptied her gold mesh-bag on the fumed oak table), "and I'll speak to your father and ask him to send you a check. It's a pity, dear, that you ——"

"Oh, thanks—thanks, Mummy!"

"Mummy" was Mildred's pet name for her mother; she used it unconsciously when she wanted Mrs. Fahnstock to do something for her. Her round face was aglow now. Her father would help them; everything would be all right. . . .

Later she came back to the tiny front room and stood over the baby's crib for a moment, gazing raptly down at him. He was woefully small and wrinkled, and he had a shock of brown fuzzy hair that gave an altogether comic effect. But Mildred thought him "too adorable"; she knew he would grow up to look just like Henry.

"Milly's pwecious lambie!" she cooed.

He was asleep, now, and quiet. When he cried she had other names for him.

She went over to the table and picked up the money that her mother had left. Fifty dollars—that would do until Mr. Fahnstock sent more. She hid the bills in a vase that Vera had sent as a

wedding gift; it was quite as well for Henry not to know.

So, when he returned from work that night he found Mildred, curled up in a big chair with a book open in her lap, reciting rhymes.

> "Higgelty-piggelty, my black hen
> Lays good eggs for gentlemen.
> Gentlemen ——"

"For Heaven's sake!" Henry snapped. "Why don't you do something useful? I should think if you were going to read instead of getting dinner, you'd take one of those children's dietetics books I gave you instead of *Mother Goose!* What on earth ——!"

It was the first time he had spoken to her like this; he must be very tired. But she was hurt, just the same.

"I'm going to be a companion to my son, not a nurse-maid!" she said stiffly.

And presently he begged her to forgive him. He found her in the kitchen with her head buried in her plump arms, weeping bitterly.

2

Henry was, as a matter of fact, learning much concerning himself, as well as concerning Mildred. Never before given to introspection, he had in the past year made one important discovery; he was weak.

If he hadn't been weak he would have gone to war. He stayed home because he couldn't leave Milly. Not because she needed him for any physical support, but because he hadn't the moral strength to make her unhappy, no matter how just the cause. That proved conclusively his spiritual feebleness; Henry faced the fact honestly, but with a growing bitterness.

For, he continued to remain quite as much in love with Mildred as he had been when he first married her. Many of her ways annoyed him, yet he wouldn't have traded her for the most scrupulous housewife and conscientious mother in existence. Milly was illogical, trivial, but—he loved her.

It hadn't been easy, nevertheless, to brave the silent but perfectly evident intolerance of the other men in his office. Henry, as soon as war was declared, had openly and enthusiastically proclaimed his intention of enlisting. But the man above him, who hadn't talked, had gone immediately and Henry had taken his place and his salary.

"Pretty soft for you, this war, huh, Mr. Tadd?"

His stenographer had been the only one to accuse him actually of "slacking." The others, the older men—many of whom would have given all they possessed for the opportunity that Henry was passing—simply ignored him.

But a letter from Mr. Fahnstock to Milly was the thrust that cut most deeply:

"Your mother tells me that you are in need of money. To that I can only reply that I should have been perfectly willing to take you back into my home if Henry Tadd had thought fit to go into the service. But since he seems to have chosen this most opportune time to improve himself financially, I see no adequate reason why I should be called upon to give you aid.

"Malcolm, when last we heard, was beating back the Bosch in Flanders. He has hopes of a captaincy, and his letters are cheerful and full of courage. He is a fine boy. I'm delighted with him.

"Inclosed you will find a check made out to you. I wish you to open a savings account for my grandson. Neither you nor Henry need appeal to me for money again. It's utterly useless."

Henry passed the letter back to Mildred. His mouth in its grimness was almost ugly, and the instinct of preparedness caused Milly to assume a hurt expression.

"Do you mean to say that you asked for money from your father without telling me? Do you mean ——?"

"Now, Henry," Milly quibbled, "don't be unreasonable. You're getting so cross lately. I don't know what I'll do with you. Goodness knows I have a hard enough time without ——"

She offered him the bread sulkily. It was Saturday noon, Henry's half-holiday. There was a matinée she had wanted to go to. They could leave the baby with Mrs. Case down-stairs, she had it all arranged. But Henry in this humor—he would

never go with her now. Still, she would broach the subject; it was worth trying.

"Of course I'm disappointed too, darling," she said sweetly. "I thought Daddy would help us without any fuss. But, after all, you're making so much more yourself now, we ought to have a little more to spend. . . . Oh, Henry!" Her eyes widened as though at a sudden happy thought. "Henry, I just had the most wonderful idea! Couldn't we—you and I—go somewhere this afternoon and forget our troubles for a while? I haven't been to the theater since—oh, I can't remember when. What fun! Shall we?"

Her enthusiasm was a trifle flat. Henry was looking at her much as a patient mastiff might watch the annoying antics of a puppy. It was useless to be angry with her. It only meant that he would injure her for a few moments, after that she would forget what he had said to her.

He sighed, a slow "ho—hummm," like a weary old man, and rose. "We can't go to the matinée—we can't spend money on things like that. Besides, I want to be alone this afternoon. I want to think."

She heard him slam the outer door behind him, then she began to pick up the dishes with a pettish clatter.

Poor old Henry . . . he wanted to think! He didn't see that when people were young that was the time for them to enjoy life. He'd probably save and save until they were both old and had nothing

to spend for. And as things were now, even her father wouldn't take her back. . . . She had certainly made a mess of affairs when she married Henry.

3

It was strange how completely Milly had dropped out of her old New York set. A little over a year ago she had been bound by common interests to a group of young people of whom she had always been an integral part, and to whom she subconsciously considered herself more or less indispensable.

Her life had been ordered somewhat as follows: school, from November to June with vacations at Christmas and Easter, counterbalanced by five months of delightful summer idleness.

The winters were by far the slowest seasons. If Milly had been older, they would have been the best. But she was still at the age when most of her contemporaries were busy students whose parents refused to allow them to attend parties of any sort except on Friday and Saturday nights. Parties . . . it had been so long since Milly had gone anywhere!

In the first place, Henry didn't like to dance. (She hadn't thought of such a possibility when she married him.) Milly had tried to teach him to fox-trot in the tiny parlor of their flat, but he wasn't a bit apt. Henry was strong, and athletic, and

muscular; he might have done acrobatic dancing admirably if he had been taken in time. But in the ballroom he would be a miserable and hopeless failure, Milly saw that in a half-dozen nerve-fagging lessons. It wasn't that he was awkward or that he didn't try. Henry knew Mildred was more than anxious for him to learn to dance; he applied himself with an earnestness, a conscientiousness that was as praiseworthy as it was pathetic. It was simply that he didn't seem to quite coördinate. His feet would be going beautifully and he would knock a candlestick off the mantelpiece with his arm as he turned; when he guided Milly through a doorway he always managed, somehow, to bang her elbow. She gave him up, at last, in despair. Henry was awfully relieved.

They received plenty of invitations, forwarded from Milly's old address. Mr. and Mrs. Henry Tadd's presence was requested at every sort of affair from receptions to theaters and dinners. The only difficulty here was that Henry's dress clothes were so impossible. He didn't think so, and he wouldn't replace them. But Milly declined everything that came, after she had dressed him up one time, on trial.

So, for the present, she had lost all of her old friends. Even her correspondence with Vera and Angela languished and died. She hoped to take those friendships up again later on; at present she was nearly as content to remain unseen. There

was always the chance if she did go out that people would become inquisitive. And she couldn't have her old friends know of Henry's and her own poverty. That would be unbearable.

Still, she sometimes wondered what had become of George. She hadn't heard from him since that one small congratulatory note that he had sent her after her elopement. She would have liked to write him again, to learn something of what he was doing, perhaps to go to a hotel to tea with him just once more, if he asked her. . . .

Marriage was stupid—so stupid! Milly was more than ever tired of the monotony of it on that Saturday afternoon. Henry had left her and had gone out. Where? Some day she would leave him and go out. She didn't know where.

4

He had said that he wanted to think, and yet that was precisely what, most of all, he didn't want to do. He was afraid to think. Always, lately, when his mind started to function he found that it worked in an unending spiral. Round and round and on and on. Unsatisfactory thoughts, his. There were no conclusions, no dénouements.

That he wished to be alone was perfectly true. Milly didn't understand, she was no good to him at this time. And he wanted to go where people didn't know him, where he wasn't constantly wondering what they thought and what they privately

said about him. At his office he was uneasy, and at home he was glum. Better for him to "clear out" for a while.

He left the house without any particular aim in view, and he wandered down the street at a melancholy amble. Force of habit, perhaps, guided him to the subway on which he travelled to and from his office every day. Habit, and the fact that subconsciously he had grown to dislike the Bronx almost as much as Mildred did.

Henry had been brought up on a Pennsylvania farm; the loneliness of broad, sweeping fields was a part of him. Yet he wasn't averse to the city. There was a quality in its ruthless, mad greediness, in its rushing impersonality, that quickened his blood and made him want to fight and conquer it. But the Bronx—here was a hybrid with the ugliness of the metropolis and none of its fascination, with the green spaces of the country boxed up in small squares and labelled "For Sale." He didn't know it, but he loathed it.

As he entered the subway kiosk he had the sensation of making an escape. He marched restlessly up and down the station platform until a train came in. Without noticing what were its headlights or its destination, he boarded it.

"Since he seems to have chosen this most opportune time to improve himself financially, I see no adequate reason why I should be called upon to give you aid. . . ."

He couldn't get that sentence from Mr. Fahnstock's letter out of his mind, somehow. He saw it written in that irregular scrawl, the periods and commas dug hard into the paper, the down-strokes black and strong and uncompromising. For the sentence was so absolutely just, on the face of it, and yet after all, it wasn't.

Because Henry hadn't wanted to improve himself for his own sake. What did a raise in salary and a better position mean to him in comparison with the mental strain that he had undergone in those last months? He wanted to do better for Milly. He had married her and had taken her away from the life that she was used to; if it hadn't been for him she would probably have become engaged to one of her many wealthy friends, and she would never have known the meaning of economy and all the hardships that go with it. . . . He owed her much, and the paying was proving so difficult. Heaven knew that he had wanted to enlist! It hadn't been that he was afraid to go. He wasn't a coward.

With a start, he saw that his train was about to leave the Times Square station. That endless revolving of his thoughts had shut him off from external things. Making a dash for the door, he squeezed out just as it was slamming to. He wanted to get to the street, to mingle in the crowds, to forget himself.

Slowly, he began to walk across town.

Fifth Avenue in war times. The buildings waving a falsely gay greeting with a myriad brilliant flags; crowds breaking and shifting in kaleidoscopic irregularity; splashes of khaki-color and of navy-blue; coins jingling in boxes extended by the hands of shabbily dressed society girls; the flash of a brave gold star on a black sleeve-band; blatant jazz from a group of itinerant cornets and saxophones between the screeches of bus-wheels and the clangs of trolleys.

Turning into the avenue, Henry halted at Forty-first Street. A miniature theater stage had been built in front of the public library and a man was addressing an audience of several hundred idlers.

"Who's that speaking?" Henry half-heartedly asked the question of his neighbor, a delivery boy with a pile of hat-boxes.

"Irvin Cobb," the boy replied. "He's a whale, that man is. Gets 'em to buy more bonds than Theda Bara can. Been over there himself, so he knows what he's talkin' about. Cost me fifty dollars the last time I listened to him."

Irvin Cobb. . . . Irvin K.—no, Irvin S. Cobb. . . . He must have been the man who wrote things for the magazines. Henry remembered reading something of his in the *Saturday Evening Post*. He couldn't recall whether it was a combination business-love-mystery-adventure story, or an article on some international question of the day. He only remembered that whatever it was, Cobb it

was who had given Henry his five cents' worth that week.

The speaker, a large, homely man with a red face and a prominent under lip, was addressing the crowd quietly, but with a sincerity that caught the attention and held it. His talk was punctuated by short bursts of applause from his audience, as though they wished to express their approval, yet hesitated to interrupt. His was no flowery eloquence, it was a straightforward statement of facts, something tangible and logical for the practical business man, yet with that subtle emotional appeal that attracted the swarms of shop-girls.

He was speaking of the financial value of Liberty Bonds, of the interest they paid and of the safety of the investment. Henry had already bought two small bonds; this sort of speech interested him. He hung on the outskirts of the crowd at first, then by degrees edged himself forward. This man could talk—there was no doubt about that.

Skillfully Cobb had changed the scene and he showed them France, showed it starkly, uncompromisingly. Henry listened, caught by the picture of what his life might so easily have been if only . . .

"Just one thing . . . buy bonds . . . sacrifice . . . stop until there isn't anything left . . . got to do that much . . . conscience' sake . . . *got* to. . . ."

As the speech closed, Henry found himself ap-

plauding vigorously. Then he started to turn away.

"Won't you buy a bond, please?"

A girl had blocked his way and was holding a pencil and a slip of paper out to him. A girl with pale features and straight, slim fingers; a girl who had hair the color of a robin's breast.

"Please—buy a bond?"

Henry paused, then grabbed the paper rashly. "Yes, I will—I'll take—a lot." Hurriedly he made out the slip and returned it to her.

He had promised a sum that it would take years for him to pay. But he went home walking on air; he was happier than he had been in months.

5

As he entered the flat Mildred's voice greeted him petulantly.

"Henry, where on earth have you been all this time?"

He strode into the parlor, his eyes still alight.

"Oh, I've been down-town. Heard a man speaking for the Liberty Loan. Great speaker!"

Mildred pouted. "And I've been in this stuffy little flat, washing dishes, and darning, and taking care of Harry, and ——"

Henry crossed to her, put one arm affectionately about her plump shoulders. "Poor little Milly! I'm sorry you had such a miserable afternoon. My! I wish you'd heard Cobb. I tell you—he was great.

Darned if I didn't subscribe most everything we have."

"You did! You—ooooh ——!" Mildred ended in a wail. "How could you? You ——!"

It had been a mistake to tell her so suddenly. Henry saw that now that the news was out. He had taken it for granted that she would understand, but Milly and he never understood one another in matters concerning money. He ought to have known.

"But Milly—it's for the war! We've got to do it—we must help along—we ——"

Mildred stamped viciously and threw herself into a chair. "Oh, Henry, if that isn't just like you! To spend the money I need for the baby on Liberty Bonds—and then to make out you're doing it for the Government! Oh, do stop pretending to be virtuous! Why didn't you enlist in the first place, if you were so anxious to do something?"

From the next room came long, feline howls. The baby had awakened and was screaming like an angry cat.

CHAPTER IV

1

HENRY never enlisted, for the armistice was signed the week after he gained Mildred's permission. Peace coming just at the time when she was all packed to return to her old home provoked Milly. She had made up her mind to at least a few months' luxury. But she settled down again to her old life. Of course it was nice to have the war over, though wasn't it her luck to have everything she owned in trunks and then not be able to go?

Her petulance over the Liberty Loan affair had been merely temporary. Henry was her husband, even if he didn't have much common sense. He would probably be doing idiotic things all his life because he thought they were right. There was no use in remaining angry with him. Milly was, after all, naturally sweet and although she didn't hesitate to make her disappointments public, it was more advantageous, she found, to play the rôle of the patient martyr.

Not that her seeming patience made it really any easier to manage her household on the pittance Henry gave her. He only provided for the bare

necessities; he seemed not to realize that there were such things as "extras." For small accessories Milly had been forced to break into the baby Harry's savings account, more than once. She hadn't told Henry that she had borrowed this money—for borrowing was all that the act amounted to. She thought perhaps Henry wouldn't appreciate her point of view. He seldom did in such cases.

Even in the Bronx Milly needed money. For in every community, however humble, there is a social leader, and Mildred, by coronation of her downstairs neighbor, Mrs. Case, had been made that queen. She had a certain reputation to maintain.

Mrs. Case was good-natured, red-haired, and Irish. She thought Mildred an "awful swell," and Milly, in turn, used her as a sort of unpaid servant. With true Hibernian exaggeration, Mrs. Case spread rumors abroad of young Mrs. Tadd's "illigance." Mildred could not walk upon the street without being conscious of a gallery of admiring glances and bows from women on stoops and others hanging from upper windows. A popularity that she rather enjoyed.

Milly was, by nature, a gregarious spirit. She wanted a large acquaintance, and she wanted to be admired. She had lost complete track of her old school friends; she missed them. She would have liked, of course, to have had some of the girls see her baby, but not in these surroundings. She

would meet them all at the five-yearly reunion. That would be time enough. For the present, Mildred was resigned to Perch Street and the obsequious advances of her neighbors.

She was kept busy caring for Harry. She fed him anything that seemed as if it probably wouldn't hurt him; she let him sleep or wake according to his own whim. As a result, Nature satirically made of him a bouncing imp of unbelievable vitality. And Mildred took credit unto herself.

"I can't understand why mothers don't keep their children healthy," she said to Mrs. Fahnstock, one day. "It's so simple, really."

"My dear, *I* never had any trouble with you and Malcolm. The little nurse-girl, Letty, that I had for you both—she used to let you suck pins and eat the varnish off things—I found out about it later. No, I think it's just that children are born healthy or else they're not. And you certainly can't keep an eye on them all the time. You have to leave some of the responsibility to Providence."

Mrs. Fahnstock closed the subject with an emphatic pursing of her red lips. But she had come to see Milly that day for a purpose. She was the bearer of news; she hastened to impart it. The clasp of her gold mesh bag caught, but she forced it open, and pulled out a newspaper clipping.

"Read this, darling." She passed the piece to Milly.

Mildred obeyed:

"Announcement has been made of the engagement of Miss Vera Henny to Mr. Edward K. Storm, of this city. Miss Henny is a daughter of the late Mr. and Mrs. Willis Henny of Siam, Ohio, and New York. She was graduated from The Shelborough School in 1916. Mr. Storm is a well-known art collector and a member of the Iris Club. No date has been set for the wedding."

As she finished reading the notice, Milly's face set in soft, dissatisfied lines. "H'mmm . . . she seems to have done rather well, doesn't she?"

"Yes." Mrs. Fahnstock shrugged heavy shoulders. "Sometimes it pays to look about, you know, dear. I've always said that. Now if you'd waited and ——"

"Oh, Mother—don't!" Milly wailed. She added crossly: "Anyway it was your fault that I ran off the way I did. You scolded me and found fault with me until life was simply unbearable. You know you did! . . . Who is this man Storm? Does anybody know?"

Mrs. Fahnstock shook her head and the marcelled waves of hair over her ears flapped against her vivid cheeks. "I've asked your father, but he doesn't seem to have heard of him. But Mr. Storm must be somebody if he belongs to the Iris Club."

"He must." Milly glanced through the clipping again. "'The late Mr. and Mrs. Willis Henny,'" she quoted. "I didn't know Vera's parents were dead. She never said much about them."

"Perhaps they've died recently. Still, you'd bet-

ter not write to her about it if you're not sure. It would be so awkward if ——" Mrs. Fahnstock's mind took a sudden jump backward. "I might ask Malcolm about this Mr. Storm, perhaps he knows him. Malcolm ——" she broke off, then went on eagerly: "Malcolm has been going with Angela Day a good deal lately—did you know?"

Her second piece of news had the desired effect. Milly's baby eyes widened in amazement.

"Malcolm—Angela ——? What do you mean?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," Mrs. Fahnstock drawled. "But the Howard Westons saw them at 'Aïda' the other night. Then, yesterday, I was going through the Vandermore and I caught sight of them dancing together in the big tea-room. I like him to be friendly with Angela—she's so safe. But I do hope he isn't serious."

Mrs. Fahnstock was the type of mother who theoretically wants her children to marry, and practically would do anything in her power to keep them single. Malcolm was her favorite. He had more brains than Milly, and his mother was somewhat afraid of him.

"The Vandermore—dancing in the tea-room! Oooooh ——!" Mildred moaned. "I haven't danced in three years!"

She had already forgotten Malcolm in the intensity of her own discontent.

"Poor darling!" Mrs. Fahnstock murmured.

. . . And she left a larger roll of bills than usual on the table when she departed.

But before Mildred went to bed that night, she studied her reflection in the mirror of her bureau.

She was still pretty, there was no doubt about that. Plumper, perhaps, but soft, and pink and white. Her pale yellow hair, curling at the roots like a baby's, made her look younger. And the dissatisfied droop of her mouth lifted instinctively as she met her own gaze.

"I wonder—I wonder if I had waited—if ——"

Henry called to her from the next room: "Mildred, Harry can't seem to get to sleep. He wants you."

With a sigh, she snapped off the light and went in to soothe the baby.

2

There was something in the air, that spring afternoon, which took Mildred back to the time when she had worn her first evening gown, and when George Warbridge had brought her violets.

A stroll on Fifth Avenue hadn't seemed such a treat in those days; there had been no small Harry and no Mrs. Case with whom to leave him when one went on a shopping trip.

She had been light-hearted then, and free. The worst thing that could happen to her in that careless past was to have infinitesimal annoyances—a gown made for a special occasion arriving too late,

a new feather fan left inadvertently in a taxicab—these had been her consummate troubles before she had married Henry.

Well, she could be care-free now—even though it were only for one afternoon! She would put the present away, in the farthermost corner of her mind. She would be Mildred Fahnstock to-day, the Mildred of silver wreaths and of slim-heeled dancing slippers, of green orchids, and of five-pound boxes of Shirley's chocolates.

With jaunty step, Mildred picked her way among the crowds. Her frock, the one remnant of her prenuptial wardrobe, was still smart and she knew it became her. Fashions had changed so little, except in the length of the skirts, and a fresh ruffle in the neck had helped. Of course there was a hole under one of the arms, but if she didn't raise her hand too high, it wouldn't show.

She hummed a tune under her breath as she walked along, an air from *Watch Your Step,* one that had been popular at the time of her senior "prom" at school. Her feet involuntarily kept in time with the syncopation.

Occasionally she stopped to gaze in at some of the more exclusive shops: Mme. Darquenne's,—she had always gone there for gowns and negligées; Gray's for suits and cloaks; Frederick's for shoes. . . . In her mind she planned an elaborate wardrobe of the things that she saw in the windows. Cream lace in tiny ruffles with a narrow ribbon

girdle, wouldn't that be adorable for informal parties? She needed an evening wrap. A horizon blue brocade with tailless ermine collar was what she would want. Blue was always so becoming. And then a dinner-gown. . . . Her imagination wandered on with delightful absurdness. She had almost forgotten Henry, and the baby, and even the Bronx.

"Why,—Milly! Mildred Fahnstock!"

The sound of that voice fitted into the illusion. She swung about.

"George Warbridge! Speaking of angels—I was just thinking about you. It's ages since I've seen you."

She gave him her soft plump hand eagerly.

He was the same George, as dapper and as self-important as an early robin, ruddy of face, and with those black bead-like eyes that were so singularly expressionless.

"Well, well, you're looking fine," he said. "You've gained some, haven't you? But you're looking fine. I hear you're the mother of a splendid boy."

Mildred gave him a pained smile, but she answered sweetly: "Yes. A good deal has happened to me since you last saw me."

"Well, well."

The same taciturn manner; that familiar way of catching the rhetorical ball and neglecting to pass it back. Mildred clutched at George's companion-

ship as she might have seized the vision of her own former estate, before it fled. Somehow he symbolized that old life to her; the sight of his stodgy figure rejuvenated her.

They were in the center of the sidewalk at a corner of Forty-third Street. The crowds swam about, knocking against them.

"We seem to be stopping the traffic," Mildred said. "Couldn't we go somewhere and—and talk? It's awkward standing here, and I do want to hear all the news, and what you've been doing, and everything."

George hesitated. "Well, I know a new place on Madison Avenue; if you'll come over, we can have tea and ——"

Tea. . . . The many parties that she had had with George flashed through Milly's mind. And to be going with him again—oh, it would be fun!

"I'd—I'd love to!"

Her hand started to wander to her hair in the pretty gesture that had been her greatest asset in all flirtations before her marriage. Then she remembered the hole in her dress and swiftly lowered her arm.

But George was looking down the block. "Come on, then," he commanded in a matter-of-fact tone. "We'll walk there—it's only a step."

As he led her across Forty-third Street, Mildred glanced at him sidewise, speculatively. No, he

hadn't changed much. A bit more self-important, perhaps, but men were always more conceited than boys. And he was so well-groomed. She loved that about him. His clothes were quiet; you wouldn't be apt to notice them, but if you did, you remembered them. The angle of his cravat was correct to the sixty-fourth of an inch; the ribbon band of his soft felt hat was a shade narrower than was customary. His tastes were so subdued as to be distinctive. Mildred had always liked to be seen with him.

Idly she slipped the gold circlet from her third finger, and dropped it into her hand-bag. It was silly, but she felt so much younger without it. . . .

"Here we are." Warbridge's voice cut in on her wandering thoughts. He held the door for her and she stepped inside.

The tea-room was decorated in Old Dutch style, with stalls along the panelled walls. Milly saw, with regret, that there was no dancing space. But George chose a table near the rear, and she sank down with a cozy sigh.

"This is charming," she murmured. "And I'm so tired."

As he ordered tea, she leaned back against the wall and watched him. He looked up presently and met her quizzical gaze.

"Well?" he queried.

She laughed. "I suppose you want me to do all

the talking, as usual. But I'm not going to. You must tell me the news about yourself. What are you doing, now?"

"Same old thing," he began laconically. "In business with my dad, again, now the war is over. But say ——" His round face brightened. "There is some news, though—unless you've already heard it. Been put up at the Iris Club. Pretty good for a young chap, eh?"

"Splendid!" Milly was all enthusiasm. She clapped her baby hands together. "The Iris Club ——!" she stopped. "Oh, by the way—did you see the announcement of Vera Henny's engagement? She's marrying an Iris member, Edward Storm. I wonder if you know him?"

George shook his head. "You see I'm so new there. I'll look him up, though. Vera Henny—she was one of the 'Big Three,' wasn't she?"

Tea had arrived in blue and white china, a delight to Milly, who so seldom ate anything but her own cooking. She poured daintily and passed Warbridge a cup before replying.

"Yes. Vera, and Angela Day, and I. My, what fun we used to have!"

George coughed. "Angela Day—I ——"

"Yes, Angela," Milly chattered. "Do you ever see her? I never do."

"Occasionally. She—I believe she's interested in writing ——" George faltered. "Sort of a hobby with her, I guess. She ——"

"Did you know that she and Malcolm are going together? Isn't that a joke?"

His ruddy face stiffened, but his tone was, by effort, commonplace. "I had—heard that. Do you suppose he's by any chance—serious?"

"Mal?" Milly giggled. "Oh, he's in love with someone, always, you know."

There was a pause and Milly took another cinnamon bun. In the back of her mind the unpleasant thought arose that Henry must be home by now, and he would be impatient for his dinner. But she remembered that Saturday afternoon when he had left her alone, and had gone out and bought Liberty Bonds with the money that she needed. And—"Do you remember the time you brought me violets, George?" she said.

"Do I? And the time you wore that pink dress with all those funny little things down the sides that kept catching in everything?"

She laughed delightedly. "How well you remember!"

"I can recall much more than that."

With a new enthusiasm he began to recount their experiences together in the old days. Milly listened, entranced. At last his memory gave out. She rose reluctantly to go.

At the door, as they finally parted, Milly looked up at him appealingly. "George, this has been lovely. I don't know when I've enjoyed anything so much. And now—it's over."

He took her outstretched hand and said seriously: "It's meant an awful lot to me, Milly—more than you can possibly imagine." She gave a little, half-smothered gasp, and he continued quickly: "Though I don't see why you shouldn't know, either. Fact is, I'm—Angela—well, I guess I'm pretty hard hit this time. And what you said about Malcolm not being serious just ——"

Milly withdrew her hand abruptly. "Oh, I see. Well"—she flashed a brilliant smile—"good-bye, George!"

Clicking her heels at each step, she made her way across town and vanished in the yawning maw of the subway. . . . Viciously she wrenched her wedding-ring over the knuckle of her plump finger. Back in its place again, and she was back in her place. . . . There were angry tears in her eyes.

3

For Milly's pride was unforgivably wounded. George Warbridge she had pictured as a dejected figure, after her marriage. Poor boy, he had adored her so!—that had been her attitude whenever she thought of him. And lately she had been thinking of him more and more.

With Henry she was growing to be far from satisfied. He was good, and faithful, and true, and handsome, but even a dog could be any of these. A dog could be quite as interesting. Anyway, what

was the use of his being so good-looking, if she couldn't show him off to people?

She was weary of the tiresomeness of her married life. Mildred Fahnstock washing and ironing and cooking and sewing—being a general slave to stupid Henry, who didn't even try to understand the things that she craved!

Existence without luxury was meaningless to her. It had been all very well at first; she hadn't expected it to last. But things had gone on now, so long! She was tired of being poor, of living this romanceless sort of life, of standing simply as an unknown man's wife, of representing just one of a million women similarly situated.

So, discontent with actualities, she had built a second world in her own fancy. A romantic world, with Mildred Fahnstock as the central figure. Pretty, charming Milly, exquisitely gowned in pathetic black, and surrounded, literally hemmed in, by—men! They wanted to motor with her, to canoe with her, to comfort her. But she waved them away. Always, on the outer rim of the crowd, there stood a figure. It was George.

All these years he had waited for her, and now that she was widowed a new hope had sprung within him.

"Dearest—I didn't know that you cared so much"—(she could imagine her own voice liquid and sweet). "I'll try to make up to you all that I've kept from you in the past ——"

Bang! And the baby had tumbled off a chair and she must pick him up and rock him until he finally stopped those blood-curdling howls. . . .

That afternoon on Fifth Avenue, then, she had been primed for adventure. George had stepped into the picture at the psychological moment. George, who had always adored her, who had been waiting all these years for the breath-space of a single minute with her.

Eagerly she had caught at romance, too eagerly. If she had let him go she needn't have known the faithlessness of man. She would have always believed in George, and in his love for her. But now she knew him as he was: fickle, and utterly unworthy. She had been wasting her precious world of dreams, while he was flirting with Angela Day—thinking himself in love with her. Mildred clenched her plump fists. George Warbridge didn't even know what love was. She hated him.

4

Henry called out to her good-naturedly as she came in: "I thought you'd left me for good. Did you bring any food with you?"

Milly entered the tiny parlor and flung off her hat on the table. "If you want any food, you can get it," she snapped. "I'm tired. Besides, I haven't any money." She threw herself into a chair.

"But I thought—why, I gave you your weekly allowance only yesterday ——"

"Well, I've been shopping. There are things that we must have. You wouldn't think of kitchen utensils and towels and sheets, and all that, would you? But we've got to have them, just the same. And what's more"—Milly's childish voice became rasping and hard—"my old friend, Vera Henny, is going to be married, and we have to send her a wedding present. So you may as well make up your mind to it, I've got to have more money!"

Henry whistled. "Vera Henny? . . . You never see her. Why must we send her a present?"

"Because I won't have her know that we're poor. And because she sent us a gift when we got married. That vase, over there."

She pointed to a piece of cloisonné on the mantel. Henry crossed to it and picked it up. As he lifted it, something within jingled. He peered inside.

"Milly—it's money!"

She looked at him, at first frightened. Then her expression became sulky. "I know it is. You don't give me anything, so Mother helped me out a little. I even had to draw out some of the baby's money—you're so stingy!"

He said nothing for a moment. When his voice finally came it was shaky. "You—you've been deceiving me again. Taking money once more from your family when I forbade it. You—you've taken the baby's money—you—you ——"

His dull face was the finer for its stern pallor. Milly shrank back.

"I didn't do anything. The baby will have all the money he wants some day, you know that. He needs things now. It was best for me to spend it for him. Don't you see?"

"Yes, I see perfectly." He turned abruptly and went out of the room.

Milly looked about, bewildered.

Surely she hadn't done anything very bad! A few white lies—just little ones—and when she had drawn from Harry's savings accounts she had spent only a small part for herself. Henry was so unreasonable! And nobody loved her—not even Henry!

When he returned presently, he found her weeping. She looked up at him through her tears. "Henry—I didn't mean to do anything—I just had to have—the money. I didn't know ——"

He went over to her and wearily sank down on the arm of her chair. "I don't suppose you did," he said sadly. "I don't suppose you'll ever know. That's just the trouble. It's—it's so hopeless."

She raised her face to his and caught his arm in her two hands. "Then you're not angry? Say you're not angry!"

He bent and kissed one pink cheek absently. "No," he sighed. "I'm not angry. What would be the use?"

"And—and I must have money for Vera's gift—

especially if you won't let me take anything from Mother. Do you think you could ——? You see you put so much into the Liberty Loan and everything ——"

"H'mmm. . . . I did do that much for the war." His tone was bitter. He added: "Yes, I'll try to see if I can't give you more. I'll try. . . ."

Milly jumped up, and smiled through her tears. At least she had won her point.

"Henry, won't you go out and get something for us to eat? I'm hungry, too, now."

And, singing softly, she began to set the table.

5

A conversation that happened in Henry's mind as he trudged to the delicatessen three blocks away:

"Look here, Milly darling. We've started all wrong, you and I. We've tried to love each other without understanding each other, and it can't be done."

"Yes, Henry dear."

"You see, we've been pulling in different directions ever since we've been married. I'm all for looking into the future and—and building a strong foundation. You—well, you like to have a good time as you jog along. I don't blame you. Maybe I've been too strict."

"Oh, no, dear!"

"Yes, maybe I have. Of course it's the Liberty Bonds that keep us so tight right now. But I'll get those paid up before long, and then I was thinking ——"

"What, Henry?"

"Just that we might begin looking for a little apartment down-town somewhere. And I was thinking ——"

But at this point Henry's mouth drew into a grim line. Thinking. That was all that he could afford to do, really—think of looking at an apartment, think of making Mildred happier.

Frowning, he entered the delicatessen store. Perhaps he could get some special treat for Milly, just for to-night.

A gleaming mound of lobster salad rose in untouched splendor beneath the glass case.

"How much is that, please?"

"A dollar and a half a pound."

Henry swallowed hard. "Give me a half—a pound," he faltered.

What did it matter if he went without his lunch next day? Milly would have all the lobster salad she could eat. Joyfully Henry hastened home to her.

CHAPTER V

1

A FEW months after their encounter on Fifth Avenue Mildred received a note from George Warbridge:

"Won't you meet me for tea again? Most important to me. I need you pretty badly."

So, George had come to his senses once more. Mildred was aglow with romantic expectations. She must be discreet, and certainly she had no intention of letting the affair go beyond proper bounds, but it would be thrilling to have a secret appointment with George to go to tea, say, once a week. It was so sort of clandestine. She wrote him that she would meet him at the same place where they had gone before, and at four-thirty the following day she found him awaiting her in one of the stalls at the side of the room.

She was surprised at his appearance. That dapper look of his was lacking. He wasn't untidy, but his grooming showed a want of care.

"Milly—I'm so glad you came." He seated himself beside her, his bead-like eyes blinking fast. "I needed you awfully."

Mildred's hand patted the blonde curls at her

ears. "Oh, George! Am I—am I as important to you as that?"

He nodded. "You're all I've got. I haven't any sisters, or a mother. And I don't know—you kind of need a woman sometimes. Men aren't interested in another fellow's troubles."

George had come to his senses with a vengeance! Mildred was somewhat flustrated by the suddenness of the change. But she smiled sweetly.

"It makes me very happy to know that I'm of some use to my friends, particularly you, George."

Wasn't this just like the second act of a play? A clever young married woman being made violent love to by an old suitor. Milly was having a beautiful time.

Meanwhile George had started to reply, but he stopped as a waiter came for their order.

"Tea and French pastry,"—Milly's manner was charmingly childlike. "And I want some of those cakes with the strawberry things on top."

"Just tea for me," George added absently.

The waiter withdrew. Milly looked toward Warbridge expectantly. "You were going to say?" she prompted.

"I—I ——" Words came to George Warbridge with unmitigated reluctance. "Well, I might as well tell you the whole thing—at once. It's this—Angela's thrown me over."

Milly's eyes widened, then narrowed again, and her soft mouth drew down at the corners.

If this was why he had asked her to tea! The idea of her wasting her time listening to that horrid George tell about his nonsensical love-making! Angela had "thrown him over," had she? Well, Milly didn't wonder. Anyone would do the same; he had no sense of fitness.

But George continued: "The funny thing of it is that she doesn't seem to be going with Malcolm any longer either. So it isn't that he's—cut me out. I guess it's just that she hasn't any use for me—at all."

Milly shrugged. "Really, George, I'm afraid I can't be of any help to you. I never see Angela, you know. I haven't the least idea ——"

"Yes, but you're a girl," he interrupted. "You ought to know why it is that other girls do things. How their minds work, I mean. Of course ——" he slowly shook his stodgy head. "Of course I know I haven't any show with Angela—I've given up all hope of that. I only sort of kidded myself along anyway—I didn't really think she'd have me. But —what I want to know is—why won't she even see me? We used to be friends, at least!"

The scorn in Milly's baby eyes was scorching, if George had bothered to look in them. "Probably you get on her nerves. Maybe she doesn't like the way you sit with your feet toed-in. Or maybe she hates the way you blink your eyes."

"Good Lord!" George was meekly shocked. "Do I do those things?"

Milly laughed unpleasantly. "I should say you do. And stop fiddling with that fork! Now you're getting on *my* nerves."

George attempted a smile. "Your voice has the same sound it had on that night when you turned me out of your house and threw my flowers after me. Do you remember that? Huh. . . . I'm certainly popular with the female sex."

He gave his cigarette a vicious tap and struck a light. Neither spoke as the waiter arranged the tea things. But when they were alone again George turned to Mildred.

"You know I didn't get you here entirely to listen to my selfish troubles."

"No?" Milly had ceased to be interested in George or his affairs to the smallest degree; her complete attention was focussed on the strawberry cakes.

"No."

He reached beneath his overcoat, which he had thrown on the seat beside him, and he drew forth a box.

"I—I got this thing in Paris when I was on leave one day. I thought maybe I could give it to Angela—sometime. Now I know I can't. Perhaps you'd like to have it. The thing's no good to me."

Mildred's interest had been slightly caught. She took the box and opened it. She gasped.

"George!—For me?"

Within lay the most exquisite of bead bags. Delicate pastel shades, infinitesimal beads, a lustrous design of fleurs-de-lis and mignonettes. Milly lifted it tenderly by its slender gold-linked chain.

"Oh—how wonderful! And how darling of you!"

"I thought," George said, "I thought that the light blue, in there, would look so kind of pretty with Angela's hair. . . ."

Milly didn't hear him. Her face was flushed a delightful pink. "I simply love it! It will be just the thing for Vera's wedding—I got the invitation yesterday. And it will set off any costume! Oh, you dear old thing—how did you ever happen to think of me ——?"

The tea that afternoon was a surprising success, considering its rather dubious beginning. Milly, indeed, proved so sympathetic that George told her the history of his entire romantic disappointment. She nearly wept for him. . . . Milly was such a friendly little thing.

2

And Mildred intended to go to Vera's wedding until almost the last moment, when she made a horrible discovery. Her one and only suitable gown gave out completely so that to repair it would have taken more material than there was left in the original.

The next day, when Mrs. Fahnstock came to pay

her weekly call, she found Mildred in a decidedly morose mood.

"It doesn't do any good, my telling you my troubles," Milly sighed. "Now that Henry won't let me take any money from you, it just means that I've got to go on, plodding along without any hope from anyone."

Mildred hadn't imparted the news of the bead bag to either her mother or to Henry. They wouldn't understand, and Henry would probably try to make her give it back.

Mrs. Fahnstock clucked with her tongue at Milly's complaint, and handed her daughter a book. "See, dear, what I've brought you. It's by Angela Day—would you ever think it? I believe it's having quite a sale."

Milly raised her eyebrows and glanced at the cover of the book before laying it aside. "It seems so queer," she said, reverting to the recitation of her grievances, "that I, who used to have everything, should be forced to live in poverty like this. Why, Mother, I haven't a thing—not a decent thing to wear!"

Mrs. Fahnstock yawned delicately, with three jewelled fingers over her reddened lips. It bored her beyond words to hear Milly's woes so continually recounted. As a mother she had always done and was still doing the best that she could for Milly. She conceded the point, nevertheless, that it was tragic to be without an ample wardrobe.

Even the thought of wearing tan gloves with gray shoes because one couldn't afford to have them match, made her shudder.

"I used to think," Milly continued dolefully, "that Henry was going to amount to something and that we'd be rich. Now I doubt even that. Do you know what he wanted to do? . . . When that man, Stevenson, in his office, came back from the war Henry wanted to give him his former place and return to the old wage scale. I just had to fight him to keep him from doing that. He has a sort of foolish pride that would get us all into still more trouble if it weren't for me. Men are so selfish!"

Once more Mrs. Fahnstock attempted to change the subject. "I wish you'd read Angela's book, Milly," she said lightly. "It's rather interesting, though I'm sure I don't see the point of it. The advertisements say it's a satire, and I thought that meant that it was going to be funny. But it's quite serious—it's about people a great deal like us—an average American family of ——"

"But Mother"—Milly broke in—"Angela and Malcolm—I hear they're ——"

Mrs. Fahnstock nodded. "Yes. That was broken off long ago. I'm glad, though Mal was fearfully upset."

"Strange," Milly mused, "strange what Malcolm could have seen in Angela. I never thought she was pretty, did you? Of course she dressed

well. . . ." Her voice trailed off mournfully at the thought of clothes.

Not until then did Mrs. Fahnstock catch the drift of Milly's conversation. Quite suddenly she understood. "I suppose—I suppose it would be different if you received a present that wasn't in cash, from me, wouldn't it, dear? I never thought—but that would make a difference, wouldn't it?"

Milly gave her a wistful smile. "Oh, Mummy—you're so *good!*" she murmured. . . .

Her reward came a few days later in the shape of an entire costume. A gown from Mme. Darquenne's, shoes from Frederick's—none of her favorite shops had been forgotten. And on the same day the invitation to the fifth-year reunion of her class at The Shelborough School arrived. Milly was radiant.

3

But to Milly's disgust and fury, Henry refused to allow her to keep the things.

"You wouldn't be so mean," she begged. "I've nothing to wear and my five-yearly reunion is two weeks off. I've looked forward to it all these years, and I can't go unless I look right—you've no idea how critical girls are! And you won't make me send the things back, will you? You couldn't!"

The argument took place one evening; the boxes had arrived late that afternoon.

Henry looked up over the paper that he was

pretending to read. "I can and I will, so you may as well make the best of it. I'm tired of having you take charity from the Fahnstock family. It's got to stop."

Milly pouted sulkily. . . . If Henry thought that she was going to obey, he was very much mistaken. She wanted those clothes more than anything on earth; she had no intention of giving them up.

Although it was nearly eight o'clock, the baby, Harry, sat on the floor at Henry's feet, playing with a piece of string. He had grown into a plump youngster, much resembling his mother both in appearance and disposition. Three years' practice had made his tear glands as responsive to his displeasure as an automatic sprinkler to heat.

"Da-da play wiv Harry," he invited, lassoing one of his father's feet with his string. "Play horsie!"

Henry bent over and patted the child's head. "Good old Harry. Want me to be a horse, do you? Say, Milly, oughtn't this kid to be in bed?"

The baby let out a whimper at the mention of bed, and Milly turned her back without a word. She had decided to discipline Henry by refusing to speak to him until he gave in to her wishes.

"Well," Henry said cheerfully, picking up the child, "we'll have just a little game before we go to bed, eh? What shall we play? Or I'll tell you a story while you sit on my lap. That would be

better." He cleared his throat. "Er—ah—once there was a little boy ——"

"Do' wannaaa 'tory!"

The baby reached over to the table beside Tadd's chair and pulled on the spread. The electric lamp in the center swayed, but Henry caught and steadied it.

"No! No! Mustn't do that!"

It was with difficulty that Mildred maintained her silence. Henry ought to know that it was wrong to say "mustn't" to the baby. Milly had read somewhere that too many commands stunted the psychological growth, or something. One should lead a child gently, taking care to give full sway to the small personality.

"Ow—eeee!" Harry bawled. He wriggled and kicked viciously against his father's restraining hold. "I—da—wannaaaa!"

Just on general principles he screamed; he didn't know what he wanted or what he didn't want. Usually this sort of attitude brought relief in the form of candy or a lump of sugar.

But Henry set him down abruptly. "You're a bad boy," he declared. "Daddy won't play with a bad boy like you."

He picked up his newspaper and again pretended to read. The baby's yell dwindled to short, choking sobs, then quiet. The silence should have served as a warning.

There was a crash, and the lamp was on the floor,

one of the bulbs smashed, and Harry gleefully waving the spread.

"Oh, he's cut!" Milly shrieked.

"He's not cut at all—but he's a bad, disobedient child and he's going to be punished." Henry took the boy's hands in his own. "This is the naughty part. This is the part to be punished." He gave the small hands two sharp slaps.

"Ow—eeee! Oooooh!" The child's voice rose in shrill wails. Angry tears streamed down his round face.

Milly rushed to him, flung her arms about him, her eyes blazing. "There, there! Blessed darling!" And to Henry: "You—you brute! Don't you ever dare touch my child again—don't you dare!"

She lifted the baby in her arms and carried him out to the bedroom, where she laid him in his crib. "Don't cry, precious—don't! Mother'll give you a great big box of chocolates! There!"

But while she undressed the whimpering child an old young man sat in the tiny parlor with his fingers in his ears.

4

Milly returned later and without a word went over to the corner of the room, where reposed the boxes of garments that Mrs. Fahnstock had sent. The baby was at last quiet, evidently asleep.

Henry glanced up as she entered, and his eyes followed her movements wearily. "I'm sorry that you thought I was cruel," he began. "Harry must be taught to obey—he must!"

She gave him a look that was half scorn and half reproach and made no answer.

"I didn't really hurt him, you know, dear."

"No, you didn't!" She swung about. "A thing like that may make him into a nervous man. His—Unconscious will retain that memory—it may even make him a failure in life!"

"Unconscious—bosh!"

Milly stiffened, then suddenly her baby eyes filled with tears. "Oh, Henry! How can you ——? You're so—brutal!"

He rose and walked around the table, then over to where she stood. "I—I don't know what's the matter with me, Milly. I try to make you happy—honestly. We—we just don't seem to—fit."

They stood there silently a moment, Milly sniffing quietly and wiping her eyes, Henry with his head bent and a frown puckering his fine, broad forehead. Finally he shrugged, and reaching out, touched her shoulder gently.

"Milly—I'll do anything you like. . . . I'm sorry. . . ."

She drew away. "P-p-promise me that you'll never whip Harry again!"

He frowned. "I promise."

"And that you'll let me keep the—the clothes Mother sent."

"Now, Milly, I can't. I——"

She sank down in a chair and gave herself up to her weeping. "I haven't anything. . . . I want to go to the reunion . . . you won't let me. . . . Angela will have nice clothes—so will Vera . . . she married a rich man!"

He threw up his hands in a gesture of despair. "All right. Go ahead. Do anything you like!"

Milly jumped up in childlike delight, the tears still wet on her cheeks. She ran for the boxes, and gathering them up, started, laden with them, toward the door. "I'll try them on!" she cried. "Won't that be fun? I'll see how they look!"

5

From the next room he could hear the rustle of silk, the swish of tissue.

Why was it that he could never stand out against her for what he thought was right? Why did her tears, her soft, appealing prettiness break down his strongest resolutions?

"If only I weren't so reasonable!" he murmured. "If only I didn't get her angle so clearly—if I weren't so much in sympathy with her!"

That, he decided, had been their source of trouble from the first. He had felt so deeply the things

of which he was depriving her. She had never desired what wouldn't, by rights, have been hers except for him; he had wanted so desperately to make those things up to her. And he hadn't been able.

Then, the idea had occurred to him occasionally: what, after all, had she brought to him? He had eloped with her to take her away from mental unhappiness; his intention, at least, had been unselfish. But Milly—Milly's attitude had been one of complete egotism with him, always. Henry sometimes felt that in her life he figured much in the light of a faithful domestic animal, only to be tolerated and to be made use of.

He disliked these thoughts and avoided them, but they recurred. They came to him now, more forcefully than ever, and to escape them he rose and went direct to Milly.

She was standing before her mirror dressed in her new finery, while she gazed with naïve delight at her own image. But at the sound of Henry's step in the doorway she started, and she flung something hurriedly into a bureau drawer, turning to meet him.

Probably, if she had been quite calm, if she had betrayed no guilt in her actions, he would never have noticed. She might have left the bead bag on her arm in full sight, and Henry wouldn't have been the wiser. But as it was, her quick flush made him suspicious.

He crossed to the bureau and pushing her aside, opened the drawer and pulled out the bag.

His face darkened. "Your mother didn't send this. Where did it come from?"

"Oh, Henry, I just—I ——"

"Where did it come from?"

His voice was terrible. All the exasperation of the last four years was in it. . . . If she was tricking him in this way, beside everything else!

She trembled slightly. "I'll—I'll tell you the whole truth, Henry, if you only won't frighten me so. It's nothing so very bad ——"

"You'd better tell the truth! If you don't ——"

"But—but I will! It's just that—George Warbridge ——"

"George Warbridge!" Henry's voice cracked. "Who the devil is he?"

"He—he's just an old friend! And you see he bought this for Angela Day and she ——"

"Just a minute." The hand in which Henry held the bag shook. "Just tell me one thing: did that man give you this bag?"

"Y-y-yes."

Henry's gray eyes seemed to turn dark and forbidding. He said nothing, and his silence terrified Milly.

"I—I can explain—really, I can!" she faltered piteously.

"Explain?" He took the bag and slammed it on the bureau. "Of course you can explain—you

little fool! You can explain anything—but how do I know whether you're lying or not?"

His head was beating with heavy throbs. There wasn't enough air in the room. His hands wanted to take Milly and hurt her, hurt her for all the pain that she had given him.

"You can go home!" he blurted. "I don't want you in my house. You're always threatening to go home. Well, go!"

There was something splendid in his anger. Milly didn't suppose that he had it in him. Frightened as she was, her wide eyes took in the fine whiteness of his face, the strength of his clenched fists. She moved toward him fearfully.

"Henry—on my word of honor—can't you believe me—I love you. . . . I want to stay with you!"

He turned away. "I'm through. I——"

She followed him, put her soft, timid hand on his arm. "Henry, darling—please!" Her voice broke, the inevitable tears coursed down her round cheeks. "I'm so—unhappy!"

Somehow Henry was standing beside a lake in the moonlight and a girl was laughing—and teaching him how to kiss her.

He swung about and caught her in his arms with a fierce, violent sort of tenderness.

"Milly—you can stay. I want you. But that damned bag is going back—*and you're going to do what I say!*"

Wasn't Henry wonderful? Mildred hoped that he would always be like this. He frightened her terribly, but for the first time in all her life, she loved him.

BOOK II

VERA

CHAPTER I

1

"MISS VERA HENNY . . . telegram for Miss Henny!"

A girl in chair seventeen raised indolent eyes. "I'm Miss Henny."

Turning back toward the window, she slit the yellow envelope with one tapering index finger.

WILL MEET YOU AT STATION WITH NEW AUTO. BOTH WELL. KISSES.

MA.

The girl sighed, a faint flush of displeasure tinting her high-boned cheeks. How like her mother that telegram was! Utterly unnecessary and unreasonably annoying. Mrs. Henny never stopped to think of the effect of her impulsive affectionateness. It had cost Vera many a humiliating moment. Now, for instance, she was advertised to the entire car as "Miss Henny." She had always detested the name, "Henny."

Not that it wasn't better than her own name. Her mother, in the dim past when Vera was a baby, had been a Mrs. Spiegelschultz, and her daughter had chosen the lesser of two evils when she had taken the second husband's more euphonic surname.

A man in the chair next hers was peering over his newspaper at her. Vera met his eyes scornfully, then turned her chair still farther toward the window. Strange men were always staring at her; it was rather a bore to be so unintentionally conspicuous. Still, she didn't wish that she were ugly. That arrogant beauty of hers, that power of instantly arresting public attention, she appreciated fully. Some day those things would stand her in good stead as a background for her dramatic ability.

After all, she would only be in Siam for the summer; she planned to return to New York in the fall to prepare herself to be an actress. Siam she despised. Siam, with two second-rate moving-picture houses for entertainment, with the customary feud between the Methodist and Protestant Episcopal churches for annual excitement: it was Willis Henny's home town; Vera was completely out of her sphere there.

For both Vera and her mother were native New Yorkers. Mrs. Henny had kept a rooming house on East Eighty-fourth Street after the death of her first husband, and Willis Henny had been one of her guests. He had come East with all the cash he possessed for his first vacation in ten years, and he returned to Siam a few months later with a new wife and a fortune that he had won on a margin.

Mrs. Henny's transplanting had been a success. Hers was essentially a small-town nature. New

York, for all that it had reared her, was too reserved, too casual a parent to sufficiently satisfy her friendly soul. Perhaps, in the first place, she had opened her metropolitan house to guests as a means of livelihood simply because she felt the need of the community spirit and vaguely missed it. She thrived, at any rate, upon the intimacies of Siam. She was a neighbor *par excellence,* a respected and important member of the township. And to her credit, in spite of that importance and in spite of her sudden acquisition of wealth, she never strutted. She was unaffectedly proud of her opulence, as a child is proud of a new toy. But she didn't look down upon other people because, unlike her, they had no toys.

But with Vera it was different. By a natural cleverness of observation and of adaptability, she had attained a certain social polish that was instinctive among her schoolmates. She watched them eat; she saw them meeting people; she copied their clothes. She even went so far in her minute emulation that she became too thoughtfully correct, too faultless in the elegancies. Toward both her mother and Mr. Henny she felt rather a contempt, rather a superiority. And she was as scornful toward Siam as she was toward that quarter of New York where she had so ignominiously passed the first ten years of her life. It was a case of outgrowing one's setting.

With innumerable stops, and with halting respi-

ration, the train crawled along the one-track line between Delmar Junction and Siam. Vera glanced at the time-table, then at her wrist-watch. Delmar, Pond Point, Kelton,—finally, Siam.

Her mother was waiting at the station and a line of farm-hands and village loiterers eyed the girl from the background. Mrs. Willis Henny, wife of the town's only millionaire, meeting her daughter, who had been educated back East.

"Well, Verer! Here y' are! Ain't this just fine?" Mrs. Henny wrapped Vera in her ample arms, implanted an audible kiss on her unwilling cheek. "C'mon, dearie! The new car's over here. It's a beauty! Just wait till you see!"

Vera followed, her head bent, a quick redness dyeing her neck and face. Her mother was worse than she remembered: fatter, bigger, louder, more flamboyant. Mrs. Henny never merely spoke; she always exclaimed. She was a mammoth mass of futile enthusiasm.

She hoisted herself into the tonneau of an electric blue limousine that stood drawn up to the platform with a liveried chauffeur. "Ain't that lovely, Verer? Custom-made, cost more than a Rolls-Royce! Lookit the enamel telephone!"

Vera smiled a trifle loftily. She could afford to patronize her mother now that they were out of the sight of those dreadful townspeople and farmers. "It looks—it looks exactly like—you. It fits your personality."

"Huh?" Mrs. Henny's heavy-chinned face was puzzled. "Well, I dunno. Didja have a nice trip? Whatja have to eat in the dining-car?"

"Oh,—a salad—it doesn't matter."

"Well ——" There was disappointment in the mother's tone. When she wasn't eating, she liked at least to talk about food. Suddenly she brightened. "I got something you'll like for your dinner, anyways—guess! It's a shortcake—strawrberry shortcake!"

Vera turned away without answering toward the flat expanses of fields, dry-hot and treeless. The heavy car tossed and rocked with ponderous abandon on the rough country road.

"Ohio—the ugliest state in the Union."

"It suits me even if it is kinda homely," Mrs. Henny declared. "Course we ain't here all the time, what with Par taking me travelling. Europe —there's a place! I like to see it, but I wouldn't live there if you paid me. Terrible the trouble they're having now, though. War, and that old Kaiser starting a fuss. I was to his palace in Berlin and they made you put on carpet-slippers before you could walk around his floors. Silly! I guess I've got as expensive hardwood floors as can be bought and nobody has to go in their stocking-feet around my house! Yes, I was to his palace."

They were passing a farmhouse.

"Hello, Mis' Turner! How areya?"

Mrs. Henny waved a giant hand to a lean woman in calico who stood in the doorway.

"Fancy living in a place like that!"

Mrs. Henny shrugged. "Oh, it's not so bad. Mis' Turner's a real nice little woman. . . . There! You can see our house at the next turn—remember?"

Vera shut her eyes and leaned back. She didn't want to see the house, that hideous, ornate two stories of stucco and marble. She wanted, just for a moment, to make herself believe that she was coming home to a place like that of the Fahnstocks at Quogue. A place that was luxurious and yet that didn't cry out its costliness at first glance.

Her stepfather had been unduly generous to her. Yet she had always left the details of her family life to the imagination of her friends; she doubted if they even knew whether or not she had parents at all. She had thrown out casual hints as to the extent of the Henny estate, but she had been careful not to have any of the Shelborough girls meet Mr. and Mrs. Henny when they passed through town. She was so bitterly ashamed of them, and of her home.

"What's the matter with you, Verer! Have you gone to sleep? Look, here's Par!"

The motor drew up noiselessly under the elaborate porte-cochère. A small, spare man with eyes that were kind, yet shrewd, and rusty gray hair,

opened the door of the limousine, and helped Vera out.

"Hello, girlie!" He pecked at her cheek. "Glad to see yuh. Welcome home!"

Her stepfather. . . . Vera noted his costume with a mental groan: disreputable boots and trousers, a plaid shirt with lavender suspenders. He wore no coat.

It was as if he had stopped his work about the place for a few moments in order to greet her, as no doubt he had. His servants were a pleasant novelty to him, they had only recently been installed; the extra faces in the house enlivened the atmosphere, he thought. "It got kinda lonely with just Ma and me," he would explain. But both he and Vera's mother actually preferred to wait upon themselves. There were many duties that should have been delegated to their household staff, to which they absurdly clung.

He mopped the perspiration from his head with a red cotton handkerchief. "Tom, you better take the car around to the barn." He addressed the chauffeur. "We won't want her again until after dinner." Turning to Vera: "Some flivver, eh? Watch her go! Ain't she silent? That's Tom Sutton driving her—remember Tom Sutton? Don't he look class in that rig? Well, let's go in."

He swung wide the door and Vera entered the hallway. Myriads of paintings huddled together on the walls in wide gilt frames seemed to fly at her

from every direction. Bearskin rugs, a white marble Lion of Lucerne, Louis Quinze divans and chairs—that foyer! There was too much, too fearfully much of everything.

Her stepfather's nasal voice continued conversationally: "Ma, don't Vera look fine? Wait till she sees that shortcake, eh, Ma?" And to Vera: "Did ye have a nice trip? Pretty hot, though, I guess. . . . What did ye have to eat in the dining-car?"

She turned and gave him a look of utter disdain, then without bothering to reply she started up the stairs to her room.

2

She took off her severely tailored hat and the coat of her travelling suit and laid them on the bed. Here in her own room things were in good taste, simple, eminently nice, highly lacking in distinction.

Crossing to the dressing-table, she began to let down her long, dark hair, to comb out its straight glistening skeins. Her movements were studiedly graceful; she never forgot for a moment the part that she was playing.

"Dinner, Verer,—dinner!"

Her mother's loud voice made her shudder.

"All right. I'm coming."

She twisted her hair in a high knot, gave a satis-

fied glance at the reflection in the mirror and went down-stairs, a splendid, haughty Juno.

Mr. Henny was already seated at the table when she entered the dining-room.

"Where's Mother?"

"She's out in the kitchen with Mis' Sutton. Tom's ma comes in and cooks for us, y' know. Little Edna's the up-stairs girl—we got the whole darned family working for us. Nice folks, and they need the money. Sit down, girlie—Ma'll be in in a minute."

He made an odd picture against the panelled mahogany walls at the head of the long banquet table that had been laid for three places at one end.

Vera seated herself. "Don't you—don't you—wear your coat at dinner? It's quite cool in here."

He leaned back, and putting a thumb under each suspender, snapped them smartly against his chest. "Little old shirt's good enough for me," he answered affably.

She turned away. A dull red flooded her face as she thought of Shelborough and of the other girls. If they could see her now! Mrs. Henny, exploding through the kitchen swing-door with a steaming platter, was the final touch to Vera's mortification.

"Mother, isn't there someone who can do that for you—haven't you servants?"

"Course I have! But I wanted to see that everything was right for you, Verer." Mrs. Henny laid

the platter on the table and settled herself heavily in her chair. "There, I hope it's all right. The sweet potatoes are browned just nice, and the baked ham has a cinnamon sauce we never tried before. I hopeya'll like it!"

There was a profound silence while Willis Henny sharpened his stag-horn handled carving-knife. As he started to slice the meat, Mrs. Henny broke out: "Now, Par, cut it thin! I want mine for a sanwidge!"

"Hold on, now, Ma—who's carving this animal?" He turned to Vera. "Your ma just about tells me how to breathe," he laughed.

Vera raised her perfect brows. "It matters so little—all this. Can't we talk about something beside food?"

Mr. Henny's shrewd eyes showed dismay, then he laughed again. "Guess she needs her dinner, eh, Ma? Crosser'n two sticks!"

Again a silence as the parents commenced to eat. A verbal silence, broken by the clatter of eager knives and forks against the dishes. Vera glanced from Willis Henny to her mother, then lowered her eyes to her own untouched plate.

"Why, Verer! Don'tcha like your dinner?" Mrs. Henny paused with a full fork of potato balanced half-way to her mouth.

"Yes, yes. Of course. I was just—thinking." Vera began to eat mechanically.

"Ha!" Willis Henny burst out. "Ha! Think-

ing, is it? Guess this one's in love, Ma. That's how they act, you know. Ha, ha, ha ——"

He broke off, suddenly quieted by a glare of contempt from Vera. Once more the conversation expired, only to be revived by Mrs. Henny's dramatic exit and reëntrance with the shortcake.

Her broad, pallid face was rapt with the joy of dedication as she laid the plate before Vera; she was a gigantic Vestal offering sacrificial fruits to her goddess.

"There, now, Verer—just help yourself!"

But Vera shook her head coldly. "I'm sorry—I don't care for that sort of thing. You'll have to excuse me." She rose. "Since I've finished, I think I'll go up and unpack."

It was an impossible situation. Perhaps, after a time, she would grow accustomed to her mother and her stepfather, and their ordinary, common eccentricities. But at present they irritated her almost unbearably. The only thing for her to do in order to keep peace, was to leave them to themselves as much as possible. At any rate, she was perfectly good company for herself, there was always that.

Outside, in the hallway, she heard her mother's strident tone: "But Par—she *used* to like it!" Then the voice broke and something very like a sob reached Vera's uninterested ears.

"Oh, bother! Such a fuss over nothing!" she muttered.

And an annoyed frown lodged itself between her brows as she once more climbed the stairs to her own room.

3

Willis Henny rose from the table and going to his wife, put one knobby hand tenderly on her large, heaving back.

"There, now, Ma—don't take on so! Just because Vera don't happen to care for shortcake. All of us has our queer streaks, ye know. Mebbe strawberries doesn't agree with her. Mebbe ——"

"But Par—she *used* to like it!"

He snorted. "Well, so'd I used to like carrots, and they go agin me awful, now. . . . You mustn't feel bad, honest, Ma!"

Mrs. Henny wiped her eyes, attempted to control her distorted mouth. "I just can't help being kinda disappointed. I tried so hard to have everything nice for her when she come."

"And ye did!" He bowed his head in emphasis. "I tell yuh, it's something that might happen to anybody. Vera don't like strawberries, that's all. And—and she ain't in such a good mood because she's tired from travelling."

Mrs. Henny glanced up quickly. "But, Par—the trip this afternoon! And the Watsons coming! —d'ya think she'll wanta go?"

"Wanta go? Say, you give any girl a chance to go riding to Summitville in our new car, and with

Elbert Watson, too! Just you ask her does she wanta!"

"All during dinner I thought I'd ask her and then I'd get scared."

"Scared? What of?" Willis Henny pretended ignorance.

"Well, she's different from what I expected. Seems like she's changed an awful lot this last year. She—she's so awful—grand!"

"Course she's grand. Ain't she your daughter?"

With a forced laugh, Mr. Henny went back to his place and seating himself, fell to on his hitherto untouched dessert.

In spite of those comforting words to his wife, he was uneasy about Vera, too. Her home-coming had been out of keeping with his own anticipations as well as Mrs. Henny's. Her attitude, if he had thought she realized it, would to his mind have been downright "impident." The idea of the little whipper-snapper making her mother cry!

He was, however, exceedingly fond of Vera. He had seen very little of her as yet; she had been away at school during nearly all of his married life. He liked to think of her as his own child, he who had known only a lonely bachelor's existence until he was over forty. In his vision she had been quite like her mother, big-hearted, enthusiastic, companionable. He didn't want to be disillusioned now; he was ready with countless explanations for her.

"You trot along up-stairs, Ma, and tell her about

this afternoon," he suggested. "That'll brighten her up some."

Mrs. Henny lifted her weighty body from her chair, and started, slowly, to obey. "It'd be a fine party. We'll have to go anyway, as long as the Watsons are asked. I love to eat at the Summitville hotel! If she'll only go!"

Heavily she made her way out. . . . When she had gone Willis Henny shook his head.

4

Vera, going to her room, found little Edna Sutton before the dressing-table.

Edna, she remembered, was the child with whom she had played occasionally, during that year in Siam before she had been sent away to school. They were not particularly congenial in those days; Vera, even then, possessed a fine sense of her own worth, and the Sutton child was an excellent mimic. Their companionship had ended quite abruptly with a loud, resounding slap on Edna's freckled cheek.

And now, the former playmate was the Hennys' servant. . . . Vera hoped the girl would realize the difference.

As she entered the room the maid swung about guiltily and dropped the manicure set which she had been examining.

"Oh—it's you, Ver—Miss Vera!"

Vera stood in the doorway with her hand against

her cheek in an effective attitude that she had acquired from watching Ethel Barrymore. "Yes, it's I."

She had grown to be rather a pretty little thing, had Edna, still freckled as to snub-nose, but with eyes that were large and entreating, and a wide red mouth. But far from a beauty. . . . Vera noted the fact with a certain complaisance.

"You needn't stop to unpack my things," Vera's displeased gaze was on the scattered nail-file and buffer. "I'll do that myself. You may go now, Edna."

The maid flushed. "I'm sorry—I ——"

"That will do."

She closed the door after Edna's hastily retiring figure. That was the right way to begin; now there would be no doubt as to who was in authority. Impudent girl! Meddling with things that didn't belong to her. It was well enough for her to lay out Vera's clothes, but to polish her nails with Vera's buffer . . . !

This self-consciousness in the matter of class distinction alone exposed the joints of Vera's armor. She had taught herself to be exactly like those other girls at Shelborough whom she had admired. Yet in her heart she felt the difference so acutely; she was so eternally on her guard lest others should feel it, too.

Gowns and suits were folded on the bed, just as they had come out of the suitcase and trunks.

Vera crossed to the wardrobe for hangers, returned to the bed, and started to fit the shoulders of the garments on the wooden cross-pieces. A simple velvet evening-frock of royal blue from Mme. Darquenne's; a negligée of sea-green crêpe and écru lace; a chinchilla trimmed suit of severe lines from Gray's—a good thing that she had stocked up with presentable clothes before leaving New York; Siam styles would be impossible.

She was interrupted by a knock on the door, and Mrs. Henny's bulky physique intruded itself. "Whatcha doing, Verer? Unpacking?" She came over to where her daughter sat and picked up the blue evening-gown. "Ain't that pretty! Needs some beads or something, though. Awful plain!"

"I want it plain. It looks—aristocratic."

Mrs. Henny pursed her fat cheeks. "Well, I dunno about that. But it'd look a lot more stylish if you fussed it up some." She laid aside the gown and turned to her daughter, vague worriment showing itself in lumpy creases on her wide brow. "Verer ——"

"Yes?"

"Verer, we got a little surprise forya!" Mrs. Henny's customary enthusiasm was now somewhat forced. "Do you remember Si Watson and his wife and little boy, Elbert? Well, Elbert's grown up, now, of course—he's a fine young man—and—and ——"

"Well?" Vera was impatient.

"Well, your par's got up a party for this afternoon! We're all going over to Summitville in the car and have supper at the hotel—ain't that nice!"

Vera laughed unexpectedly. "Nice? Oh, yes. It would be lovely. But I can't go. I——" she paused. Then: "I've a terrific headache. You must go without me. I'm sorry."

"Oh. . . . Par'll be so disappointed! And I thought you and Elbert——" Mrs. Henny stopped. The lines about her mouth drooped instinctively, but she made an effort to conceal the effect of Vera's frustration of their plans for her. "It's too bad, dearie! Travelling, I suppose. But maybe another time. And I guess Par and me'll have to go as long as he's already asked the Watsons." She rose unwillingly and made her ponderous way toward the door where she turned. "Never mind, Verer!" she flung back, "I'll tellya all about it!" Heavily her departing footsteps echoed down the hall.

Vera, relieved to find herself alone for the afternoon, continued unpacking.

The size and privacy of this room of hers was gratifying. In New York she had boarded with one of the Shelborough teachers who acted as official chaperone for the out-of-town pupils. Vera had been given a small rear bedroom at an exorbitant rent where she was constantly encroached upon by the other boarders.

But here, she had all this space of her own. A

place for everything: clothes, toilet articles, books . . . books. . . . At the bottom of a trunk she came upon them. Shakespeare, Ibsen, Synge, Molière,—plays and treatises on the theater.

She rather prided herself as an intellectual on the subject of the drama. Few girls of her age were so well read in that respect. She had committed to memory as many as twenty of the best known female rôles. When her opportunity came, it wouldn't find her unprepared.

The Merchant of Venice fell open at Portia's speech, and she picked up the book:

> "'The quality of mercy is not strained,
> It droppeth ——"

Her cold, excellently trained voice, pronounced the words; her fluent, conscious gestures completed the beautiful unnaturalness. . . .

That evening Mrs. Henny again burst in, this time upon a very handsome, but very sane Ophelia. Vera had gone through her repertoire. She jumped slightly at her mother's entrance, and she switched on the lights in the now half-darkened room. She had almost forgotten, for the time, that such people even existed as Willis Henny and her mother.

"Good gracious!" Mrs. Henny exclaimed. "We just got back and I heard you talking—I was afraid ——"

"Yes. It was nothing—my head is better."

Vera attempted to pin in her supposedly mad locks. "Did you enjoy your ride?"

"Did we?" Mrs. Henny beamed. "Verer, I'm so sorry you missed it! We went to the hotel for supper and we had fried chicken and asparagus salad and mushrooms and potato cakes and ——"

Vera sank into a chair wearily. After all, she believed that her head did ache distressingly.

5

The one interesting event of Vera's life in Siam was her daily trip into the town for the mail. It meant contact with the outside world, the only world that she cared anything about—New York.

Not that she received many letters. Angela Day occasionally sent a few lines when she was in an epistolary mood. Mildred Fahnstock was a poor correspondent; very little could be expected of her. And Vera hadn't bothered to make many other friends among her classmates.

No, she relied upon the papers and periodicals to which she subscribed, for her news. *The Theater Magazine, Vogue, Town Topics.* It was, in fact, in the latter sheet that she heard for the first time of Mildred's elopement:

"One of the most interesting sudden marriages during the past month was that of Miss Mildred Fahnstock, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. F. Gordon Fahnstock, to Mr. Henry Tadd. It seems that Miss

Fahnstock, who is one of this year's graduates of The Shelborough School, fell quite violently in love with Mr. Tadd, and eloped with him within two weeks after meeting him. Mr. Tadd, at the time, was serving as a clerk at the Mawosta Inn, where the Fahnstocks were spending the summer. Rumor hath it that the fond father followed the happy pair to Philadelphia, with the purpose of annulling the marriage, but that he was unsuccessful."

Vera had been idly glancing through the paper when her eye had lighted on the notice. She read it through quickly, her handsome features stiffening as she went on. Finally finishing, she threw it aside with an exclamation of annoyance.

Was serving as a clerk at the Mawosta Inn. . . .

Well, that simply meant that Mildred was done for, socially; and it simultaneously closed one of Vera's own gates to advancement.

Ever since she had first entered The Shelborough School, Vera had worked constantly with one end in view. These other girls, she soon realized, had the advantage of breeding which she could never have. They would grow up, each one with a niche into which she would eventually fit. The things that Vera would have to strive for, they would take for granted. They would marry men who had been brought up in the same limited sphere; they would raise their children to be exactly like themselves. It was a sort of endless chain, broken only occasionally by the slipping of one tiny link, which

usually tended to make the new joining stronger than ever against other breaks.

Mildred had proved to be that weaker link—Vera ought to have foreseen that! And the Fahnstocks and the Days, those two families had been Vera's stock in trade. For through them, above the families of any of the other girls, she felt that she might "arrive." The Fahnstocks had the prestige of their enormous wealth and the fact that they entertained delightfully; old Mrs. Day, Angela's grandmother and only relative, was the sort of person that people boasted of knowing.

The thought occurred to Vera, now, that perhaps she had made a mistake in placing her hope of social advancement on three unstable foundations, her two school friendships, and her dramatic ambition. People sometimes slipped into society by means of the stage, but such cases were rare. If she had made other friends in New York—but she hadn't thought that worth while, and besides, she hadn't been over popular at school. She hadn't been disliked, but her senior presidency she had owed, most of all, to her good looks. The class had simply wanted a representative of whose appearance they might be proud, so naturally enough, they had chosen her. . . .

She must, of course, send a gift to Mildred at once. She sat down at her desk and wrote a note to Gareth's in New York; a Cloisonné vase, she suggested. Mildred's home would probably be well-

appointed, (Mr. Fahnstock would see to that,) and a vase was always in excellent taste. She inclosed a card to be sent with the gift:

"My very best wishes for your happiness in the future, and my love ——"

Love . . . that was the trouble with Milly. She had always been silly about thinking herself in love. And now. . . .

Vera crossed over to her dressing-table and facing her reflection sternly, she spoke aloud:

"Don't *you* ever do a thing like that! *You* use your head!"

CHAPTER II

1

SHE was awakened that October morning by the sound of the grass cutter on the front lawn. Clip, clip,—whurrrr. . . . She lay inertly for a moment, dreading the hours before her. Then springing up, she went over to the window, to close it.

Backward and forward, across the square of green that fronted the house, Willis Henny's spare figure pushed the mower. Coatless, collarless, with spotted gray trousers and the inevitable lavender suspenders. The cool fall air gave a certain extra energy to his movements; he capered slightly, at the turns.

Vera sighed, and pulled together the curtains. She resented her stepfather's preference in the matter of doing his own chores, just as she resented everything else in connection with her life in Ohio. She didn't understand the people, or their customs, or their mode of living. It was all strange to her, after her life in New York. Why had her parents sent her away to learn to like the things that they didn't like, if this was what she must return to? She couldn't quite follow their line of reasoning.

To-day, she remembered, was the day of the Harvest Festival. All the farmers for miles about journeyed to the town of Siam for that annual

celebration. There were live-stock shows and product shows, and the young people of the village had put up a tent in which to give an afternoon entertainment. Somewhat scornfully Vera had promised to recite for them; it would be good practice for her to be before an audience again, even such an unsophisticated audience.

She chose a gray street gown that fell from her shoulders in a long, loose panel at the back; a dull blue velvet toque for her splendidly poised head. Her two-skin sable fur she carried over her arm, though she appreciated perfectly well that no one in Siam would know it from kolinsky.

She had awakened too late for breakfast; it must be nearly time to leave. At any rate, she wasn't hungry; so many hearty meals made her dull.

Her mother was heavily bustling about downstairs, and as Vera appeared she called out: "Now, ain't that too bad! I saved your wawrfuls forya until ten o'clock, Verer. Whatcha want now? Cuppa cawrfee?"

"No, nothing. Isn't it time to go?"

"Yeh. Nearly. Just waiting for Mis' Sutton to get her things on."

"Mrs. Sutton?" Vera straightened. "Surely you don't mean that you're going to take our cook with us—in our car?"

Her mother did such dreadful things! Vera's whole meticulously correct being shuddered at the idea of such indiscrimination.

"Now, Verer!" Mrs. Henny's flat features were troubled. "The Suttons are nice folks. Old Tom Sutton used to be a crony of Par's. And you mustn't think that just because—but—shhh ——" she paused with one great finger against her lips. "Here's Ednar now, with her mar."

Mrs. Sutton, small, but round and apple-faced, preceded her daughter through the kitchen swing-door. Her mouth was sunk in and toothless, and her thin gray hair was brushed back straight into a tiny knob at the back of her head. Half-way between knob and forehead the remains of a hat wobbled uncertainly.

"Go on, Ma!" Edna breathed encouragingly, and she gave a rather defiant bow to Vera. "Good-morning, Miss."

Vera took in the girl's costume. Thin dimity dress of pale pink, white shoes and stockings, cheap but demure straw hat. Edna fitted into Siam like a thrush in an Ohio field. Vera was the arrogant, self-conscious cardinal.

"There's the car!" Mrs. Henny screamed suddenly. "We better go get in!"

One by one they filed out of the door. Mrs. Henny, puffing with enthusiasm; Vera, haughtily indifferent; Mrs. Sutton, hanging back doubtfully; and Edna with an irreverent tongue stuck out in the direction of her young mistress.

There was cheerful talk exchanged between Mr. and Mrs. Henny and the three Suttons during the

ride, but Vera didn't enter in. She sat looking out of the side window, as remote as possible from the rest of the party. Her mother's loud voice shrieked almost continuously, punctuated by Edna's high giggle and an occasional guffaw from young Tom.

At last they reached the tent and the Hennys and Suttons separated, much to Vera's relief. She saw the trio go off in the direction of a frankfurter-wagon.

"How about a hot-dog, yourself, girlie?" Willis Henny inquired solicitously.

But Mrs. Henny shook her head. "No, she don't want any of that stuff! Lookit! I brought a Thermos bottle and some sanwidges and cake and olives and salted nuts. Oh, we got a fine lunch right here in the car! C'mon, Par! Let's eat!"

2

The program began at three. There was a children's play given first, "Little Robin and the Seven Bunny-Rabbits." All the children of the district took part, and instead of seven rabbits, as the title demanded, there proved to be over sixty, which included the entire public school kindergarten and most of the first primary.

The Baptist church choir sang "Beautiful Isle of Somewhere," and a collection was taken for the county poorhouse.

After that, Elbert Watson and his "Four Jazzboes," who were village boys of about his own age

and callowness, rendered five-months-old ragtime pieces on cornet, harmonica, fiddle, piano, and drum. It was as if a tinsmith had suddenly gone insane; when the din finally stopped the respite almost hurt.

They had, Vera noted with placid satisfaction, kept her recitation until the end. Now, a thin, benign gentleman whom she suspected of being a minister announced: "Miss Henny, Miss Vera Henny will give us Shelley's Ozy—Ozyman—dias." And there was a polite but faint ripple of applause.

She rose and made her way to the platform where she faced her audience, calm, perfectly assured, a trifle supercilious.

> "I met a traveller from an antique land
> Who said:——"

It was the same poem that she had recited at her graduation; in her imagination she pictured that other audience, saw them lean forward in their seats to catch her words, heard the eagerness of their applause.

> "—whose frown,
> And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command ——"

A stifled giggle from the back of the room, a high giggle that Vera recognized. Then a low murmur, and silence. Vera glaringly continued:

> "—boundless and bare,
> The lone and level sands stretch far away."

In the applause which necessarily followed, Vera found her way back to her place. She was not recalled, and the applause died an easy death.

Now, chairs were being pulled aside and an especially-built dancing floor in the center of the tent was ready for use. Elbert Watson assembled his "Jazzboes" and they struck up an inharmonious "Down Home Rag." One brave couple made the first plunge and others followed suit, until presently the floor was packed with a happy, swaying, singing crowd of young people, who fortunately were too unversed in the pursuit of pampered pleasures to be bored by simple ones.

Vera watched the proceedings uneasily. She had no desire to dance with these boys and girls, and yet she disliked to stand out so publicly branded as "unpopular." Hugging the side of the tent as inconspicuously as possible, she caught sight of Edna Sutton, prancing joyously with a red-necked farmer lad, and Vera's face hardened. Impertinent little thing! Vera was sure it was she who had laughed at Ozymandias.

She saw her mother and Willis Henny with a group of other parents in the distance. Her stepfather smiled at her, waved a knotted hand, and seeing that she was alone, came over to where she was standing. She had a sense of uneasiness at his approach.

"This ain't right," he said, frowning. "Just you wait—I'll get ye a partner."

"Oh, no—please don't," Vera replied hastily. "I'm tired. I'd much rather watch."

He shrugged, asked her if she wouldn't come with him and the other older people, and at her refusal, left her. She didn't act natural, to his way of thinking. Young girls always liked to dance, if they were normal. He sighed as he joined his wife; Vera was fast becoming a problem to him.

The tune had changed to "Pretty Baby." Boys and girls joined in the chorus as they hilariously went through the steps of a Paul Jones. To Vera their naïveté was almost shocking; they belonged to a different race from the satiated young Club de Vingt trotters whom she had met in New York. They were like a different sort of animals to her; they made her feel, by contrast, so uncomfortably out of place in their presence.

Her thoughts were interrupted by a voice at her elbow, and turning, she saw that Tom Sutton was standing beside her.

"Would you—would you dance this one with me, Miss Vera?"

Vera's handsome face flushed. With all her heart she would have liked to dance with him, to cast aside this faultless metropolitanism of hers, to join in the fun-making of those others already on the floor. But she couldn't discard the training of her past four years at a breath. She had been made over into an artificially perfect thing; she couldn't,

suddenly, shed the gilt and turn herself figuratively inside out.

And so she drew back coldly at his question. "I beg your pardon ——?"

"I say ——" he hesitated. "Don't you want to come on and dance?"

He was still in his chauffeur's livery. Vera wasn't without the sense of her own dignity and she felt now, as ever, keenly the relativity of the social classes. The idea that Tom Sutton was her servant and that he had possessed the effrontery to ask her to dance wounded her pride. She was, therefore, more brutal because of his brass buttons than she might have been, otherwise.

"I'm afraid I don't care to dance," her tone was frigid, "with you. . . ."

His boyish features whitened; her meaning was perfectly evident. He watched her as she haughtily swung about and left him standing there. When she was out of hearing, he muttered a few words:

"Well, then. Go to the deuce!"

And somewhat relieved, he went to search out a partner whom he much preferred to Miss Henny.

But out in the car, Vera settled herself for a long wait.

It was October; she wanted to go back to New York to study. She was miserable in Siam; she didn't "belong." If she could only go to dramatic school—but her stepfather wasn't enthusiastic on the subject.

The music came to her from within the tent, and she lay back with her eyes closed. "Sweetest l'ill fella, mighty lak a rose ——" It would have been nice to have had one dance . . . just one. . . . But those brass buttons. . . . Her thoughts became indefinite.

Willis Henny's cheerful voice awakened her. "Here we are, girlie! Back again! Guess you was pretty tired to drop off that way."

Vera sat up, looked about. The car had drawn up under the porte-cochère of the Henny house. Her mother and Edna and Mrs. Sutton were already on the porch; Edna was opening the front door.

Dully, she stepped out of the car and followed the three women. Once inside, she started up to her room.

"Good-night, Verer!" Mrs. Henny called out after her. "Wasn't the Festival grand? Too bad you're so tired, though! Sleep tight!"

She undressed quickly, still half-asleep, and went to her window, to open it. The sound of voices came from the direction of the garage, and Edna's high, silly giggle.

"Why did you ever ask her to dance, anyway, Tom? The stuck-up thing! She makes me plain sick!"

"Um. Me too ——" a deeper voice. "Well, I dunno just why. Guess I was kinda sorry for her, standing there decorating the wall."

"Nice of you ——" from Edna. "But you're wasting your time—on *her*."

Vera stalked to her bed. She wanted to feel superior. She succeeded in being wretched.

3

She spoke to her stepfather about her dramatic career the next day. She followed him out on the lawn after breakfast, where he still had a corner of the green to mow.

"Could you spare me a few moments for a conference this morning? I'd like to speak to you about something rather important."

He tipped his hat to the back of his head and scratched his forehead, puzzled. "Conference? Me? All right, sure."

She led him into the foyer of the house, where she seated herself stiffly in a Louis Quinze tête-à-tête chair. He dropped into the other side of it, and sat facing her.

"Well?" he asked kindly.

She came to the point immediately. "I want to go back to New York. I want to go at once."

"Why?"

"I want to study the Drama." (She pronounced it "draahma.")

"Now, go on, Vera," Willis Henny laughed good-naturedly. "You don't mean you want to be one of those high-stepping chorus girls!"

"Of course not." Her oppressive dignity si-

lenced him momentarily. "I mean that I want to become an actress," she went on. "I want to do Shakespeare, and Ibsen, and all the great dramatists. I have talent—I'm sure of that."

He stroked his chin meditatively. Then his shrewd eyes twinkled. "Well, you wasn't such a much of a hit yesterday, ye know."

"No. Not in this *town*—but in New York."

Something in her tone irritated him. "What's the matter with this town, anyway?"

"What's the matter with it?" She laughed. "Oh, everything's the matter with it. The people—the houses—the theaters—the—oh, what's the use?"

"There's a good deal of use."

She glanced at him in calm wonder. His thin face was a deep red. He shook one bony finger in her face.

"Look here!" he flared. "I've had just about enough of your sass and impertinence! Think you're better than anybody else, don't ye? You and your swell New York friends! Well, let me tell ye, young lady, you got a long stretch to go before you'll be able to measure up to some of the folks we got right here in Siam. Good, plain folks that try to be kind to each other and ain't setting around, thinking how bright and pretty they are!" He paid no attention to her scornful glance. "And I'll tell you ——" he continued. "I give you the money that put this rotten foolishness in your head,

and I'll be darned if I'll give you any more. So ye can put that in your pipe and smoke it."

When he had stamped out of the room, she still sat there, frowning. At last she rose and started up the stairs. She hadn't believed for a moment that he would refuse her request. What he had said to her made no impression beyond that one fact—she couldn't go to New York. It was altogether depressing.

4

But Willis Henny went back to his lawn-mower. His thin, flushed face changed slowly to its normal color as he returned to the quieting monotony of his work. At the end of a dozen lengths he regretted exceedingly having lost his temper.

Vera, he reasoned, must have some right on her side of the question and he hadn't given her an opportunity to express herself. He believed firmly that her attitude, on the whole, was wrong, but he felt that he would far better have convinced her of the fact had he approached her in a more open-minded manner.

The recent months had brought sincere disappointment to him. At first he had closed his eyes to Vera's shortcomings, had tried to make himself believe that they were the results of unusual situations, or of his own imagination. But Vera had persistently disillusioned him.

There was, of course, his stepdaughter's parent-

age to be considered. Mrs. Henny had confided to her second husband the delinquencies of her first.

Mr. Spiegelschultz, Vera's father, had been the sort of man who wore striped suits and large yellow diamonds, and dispassionately kicked stray cats that got in his way. He had been the owner of some kind of restaurant near Vandam Street that brought him in an exceptional income, which he spent freely—largely upon himself. So that when, one day, the police raided his quiet little place and he, coolly defying them, had been mortally shot, his wife and daughter were left with nothing but the house on East Eighty-fourth Street, with which to sustain life. Mr. Spiegelschultz, Mrs. Henny declared, had been no colder in his coffin than he was in everyday life. He had had but one passion: ambition. And that, oddly, had brought him to his death.

Vera, it was true, knew nothing of the scandal connected with her father's name, or the real reason why it had been so urgently suggested that she become a "Henny." Mr. Spiegelschultz had died before she could remember, yet his traits of character were predominant in her. Willis Henny had hoped against hope that she would develop the kindly soul of her mother, but Mrs. Henny's nature was as remote from Vera's as that of a complete stranger.

Since her advent in Siam, Mr. and Mrs. Henny had discussed Vera soberly and with an increasing bewilderment. She was like her father, Mrs. Henny

vouchsafed, only her father hadn't gone with "sassiety" as Vera had, and that made her rather harder to deal with.

"But just let's us give her time to get used to Siam, Par," Mrs. Henny insisted. "She'll be all right oncet she does get used to it."

"I've got my doubts, but we'll try. Anyways if she acts like this much longer the town'll tar and feather her," was Willis Henny's prediction.

So, they had suspended action in Vera's case, and had given her the proverbial rope with which to hang herself. Only, instead of putting it to its general use, Vera had attempted to make a lasso of it, to throw it over the Woolworth Building, and even by that means to drag herself to New York.

All this passing through Mr. Henny's mind as he slowly cut the yellowed grass, caused him once more to set aside his mower and to go back into the house.

"Ma!" his thin voice bleated like an old sheep. "Ma!"

"Yes, Par—whatcha want?" Mrs. Henny stepped out into the hallway from the dining-room where she had been shelling peas.

He motioned to her toward the gilt-furnished parlor and puzzled, she followed him into the room and watched him secretively close the door.

He faced her. "Vera and me's had a set to."

"Oh—oh, Par!" Her heavy face fell instantly

into troubled lines. "You didn't scold her? Whatja say to her?"

He hung his head. "Well, I—I told her pretty much where she got off. I hadn't ought to. She must think she's doing the right thing, I suppose. It's just that she don't know what a fool she is."

"Was she mad?"

"She? No. She ain't the kind to get mad. I wisht she was. . . . Ma—I wonder couldn't we reason with her, mebbe, let her know how we feel without busting out like I did before. Just tell her gentle like."

"'S that why you got me in here, Par? To kind of talk it over?"

"Yep." He spread his gnarled fingers, studying them absently. "And I thought mebbe she'd tell us—what's ailing her. I'd like to know. Honest I would."

Mrs. Henny nodded vehemently. "So'd I." She started for the door. "I'll go get her and bring her here." She hesitated, then turned. "Par—you won't scold her now, willya?"

"I'll be nice," he promised. "Nice as I know how to be."

When he was alone, waiting, he rehearsed a scene with Vera in which his stepdaughter, in tears, apologized for her former inconsiderateness and promised always to dwell contentedly in Siam while her parents lived. But Vera, returning in the flesh

presently with her mother, dispelled this idle day-dream.

She was so coolly reserved, so haughtily self-reliant. She came into the room with her handsome brows raised questioningly.

"You wish to see me?"

All thought of taking Vera on his lap—as she had reluctantly allowed him to do when she was a child—vanished at her tone. There was no idea of petting the nonsense out of his stepdaughter in a good-natured, fatherly way, now.

He cleared his throat. "Vera—we—your ma and I—we want to know what's the trouble. We see you ain't happy any of the time. What's wrong? Is it that yuh hate us all so bad—don't yuh want to tell us?"

Vera met his shrewd eyes quickly. Was he going to let her go to New York, after all?

"No. I don't hate you. It's simply that I don't understand you. I want to go where I fit in. I've grown away from you—don't you see?"

He understood her meaning. "I ain't got any thought of sending yuh to the city, so don't get your hopes up."

Then why did he want to talk to her? Couldn't he appreciate that they had nothing in common, that they could never come to a meeting-ground, they who were so utterly, impossibly different?

"I know what you think of me—you and Mother ——" Vera's calm voice took on a higher

pitch. "You think I'm horrid. I don't care what you think—because—because I can't help it!"

She was as surprised as Willis Henny, himself, at her flicker of emotion. But she wanted him so badly to know how she felt. If only he did, perhaps even yet he might be persuaded to send her away.

"You never had the opportunities that you've given me, and so you don't know. . . . But can't you see? I've had a taste of nectar and ambrosia. I can't come back to plain strawberry shortcake for the rest of my life—I can't!"

"But Verer ——" Mrs. Henny choked prosaically. "You used to like strawrberry shortcake ——"

"I know. I was taught to like it. And now I've been taught not to—and I never can like it again—never!" She paused, a red spot in each of her high-boned cheeks. "I hate Siam—I hate it! And you can keep me here, but you can't make me *want* to stay! . . ."

Willis Henny didn't speak again until after she strode from the room. Then he turned to his wife.

"It seems like as if it was mostly our fault, her being like this," he ventured simply.

Mrs. Henny bowed her great head. "Ours—and Jim Spiegelschultz's," she added.

5

The months dragged by interminably. Vera kept

herself still aloof from the townspeople, and although she wasn't the sort of nature to suffer from loneliness, she did experience a severe boredom.

She made one last desperate attempt to go to New York. In April, at the outbreak of the war, she insisted for a time that her duty lay in the East. But Willis Henny told her that she could roll bandages and knit socks at home if she felt so patriotic, so that ended that.

Then, one day early in June, Mr. and Mrs. Henny went out for a ride in the car that was more costly than a Rolls-Royce, and they never came back. Vera was free to direct her own life.

She was sitting in her room reading, that afternoon, when the telephone rang down-stairs. She didn't go down, since no one ever called her, and presently she heard Edna answering it.

"Hello, . . . yes, this is Mr. Henny's house . . . yes. . . . They're out. . . . They're—*what?* . . . I don't understand. . . . I——"

Something in the girl's voice made Vera rise and go to the head of the stairs. "What is it?" she called down.

But Edna didn't answer. She shook her head and Vera saw that her face was ghastly pale, her wide mouth like a scar across it. She still spoke into the mouthpiece: "They're . . . but Tom —what about—Tom? . . . Oh, no!—*no!*" Fumblingly she replaced the receiver and leaned back against the wall. "Oh, God!" she gasped.

"Dear, dear God! Don't let it be! Don't let it ——!" And she began to giggle, a high, nerve-racking giggle that ended in a sob.

Vera ran down the stairs and going swiftly over to the girl, grasped her arm. "What is it? Don't stand there like an idiot! What's happened?"

"They're—all three—it was a train—and they ——" Suddenly Edna's knees gave way and she sank to the floor, covering her face with her hands. "Oh, Tom—Tom ——" she moaned.

Mrs. Sutton appeared in the doorway. "I heard a noise, and I ——"

Edna jumped up quickly, herself forgotten in her anxiety for her mother. She rushed to her, threw her young arms about the round, bent frame. "Mother, darling—I love you—I love you! And I can take care of you all alone!" Abruptly she wheeled upon Vera. "Stop looking at us that way—stop!" she shrieked. "Haven't you any feeling for your own people—haven't you?" Then she softened, and she broke into sobs again. "Leave us by ourselves—please. I've got to tell—my—mother."

Once again in her room, Vera closed the door. They were dead. The amazing fact, once it penetrated, swept over her and left her shaking, gasping. Certain scenes flashed through her mind: her arrival in Siam, the Harvest Festival, Willis Henny mowing the lawn.

"I've been—beastly!"

She threw herself face downward across her bed, sobbing.

"Mother! Why didn't I ——? Mother! . . ."

But after a time she rose more calmly and crossed to her lavatory. It was her misfortune that she was temperamentally incapable of emotion for any length of time. The cool water on her hot face brought back her old composure, her old apathetic habit of thought.

They were dead. Now that the shock was over, she could face the fact without emotion. Only a slight excitement, a slight elation thrilled her.

Her life was still before her. She was free!

CHAPTER III

1

WILLIS HENNY, after his death, once more proved his generosity. Since he left no kin, his will had been made out in his wife's favor, without reservations, and in the event of her demise, in favor of Vera.

So, after closing the house in Siam the following fall, Vera returned to New York, a millionairess in her own right. She took a suite of rooms at the Vandermore, fitted herself out with a new wardrobe, indulged in jewels that were altogether inappropriate to her youth, and threw herself into war work.

Her ambition for the stage had been simply a means to an end. She inferred from *Town Topics* that she could attain that end by a far shorter and easier route. It was true that even chorus girls sometimes married dukes, provided that the girls were pretty enough to catch them and clever enough to win them. But it was a known fact that after marriage the young outsiders seldom really were "taken up" by the women of society. If, however, a charming and talented young lady offered her services to the Fifth Avenue League for War Relief, to what social heights might she not, eventu-

ally, aspire? Mrs. Fenwick Widderly was the president of the organization, Vera knew, and association with her, at least, might . . .

She called at the office of the league one morning shortly after her arrival in town. A private house on Madison Avenue had been taken for war work and the foyer and reception-room were filled with desks, over which, for the most part, efficient looking middle-aged women presided.

"What can I do for you?"

Vera halted at the first desk and glanced down into the face of an extremely masculine female of thirty. "I've come to volunteer—to offer my services."

"Splendid. Sit down. What can you do?" The virile young woman whipped out a file card, poised a competent pencil above it.

"I can recite."

"Recite? The hell you say! What can you recite?"

Vera stiffened. "Almost anything. I give recitations. I could do it to amuse the wounded soldiers or ——"

"Can you dance?"

"I beg your pardon ——?" Vera was altogether at sea with this stranger. Could she be one of the —elect? It seemed impossible. No, surely she must be one of the paid workers, perhaps one of Mrs. Widderly's secretaries.

"I say—can you dance? We need dancing girls

—girls with moral references. How about you? Can you qualify?"

"I'm a graduate of The Shelborough School. Dr. Shelborough will supply any references necessary." Vera raised her chin and looked out between haughtily half-closed lids.

"Name, please?"

"Miss Vera Henny."

"Miss Vera—how do you spell the last name? H-e-n-n-y—oh, *Henny!*" The woman filled out the card; her eyes looked up pleasantly over horn-rimmed spectacles. "You'll do fine, Miss Henny. We'll have you dancing and we'll have you reciting, don't worry. Now come with me and I'll introduce you to some of our officers. My name is Doolan, Mrs. John Doolan." She thrust out her business-like hand and Vera touched it with her own cool fingers.

"How do you do?"

She followed the woman's lead and they made the round of the desks. Mrs. Tersen, Miss Wainbright, Miss Holt, Mrs. Andrew Meredith—some of the names Vera recognized at once and was correspondingly cordial. They, in turn, welcomed her cheerfully, though with a certain reserve. But their attitude toward Mrs. Doolan was surprisingly friendly: they laughed at her profanity, they indulged her masculinity. It was evident that she was a league favorite.

"Come on, Miss Henny," she said finally, after

Vera had been introduced on all sides. "You come with me and I'll take you to Mrs. Widderly. She's our president, you know."

Mrs. Fenwick Widderly. . . . Vera's proud head involuntarily lifted the more at the idea of meeting her. She had hoped to come in contact with her through the league, but she had thought to wait months, perhaps, for an opportunity like this.

She was taken into a private room opening at the right of the foyer. As she and Mrs. Doolan entered, an elderly woman who had been standing with her back to the door, looking through some letter files, turned about.

"Mrs. Widderly, this is Miss Henny," Mrs. Doolan announced. "She's volunteered to help us, and—thank God—she's willing to dance."

Mrs. Widderly came forward and smiled at Vera. She was slim and frail, with white hair and a firm chin. Her face in repose had a tragic cast and the smile flashed across it in brilliant relief.

"I'm glad you'll dance. We have such difficulty getting the right sort of girls. Most of the girls whom we want are attending the officers' Club balls at the Vandermore—and, of course, here we only have enlisted men."

"Oh, yes?" Vera gazed back a trifle blankly. It hadn't occurred to her that she might be required to dance with any ordinary soldier or sailor who happened to ask her. But it was obviously not the time to show disappointment. She remarked virtu-

ously: "The enlisted men are surely as worthy subjects as the officers—don't you think, Mrs. Widderly?"

The older woman, Vera noted with satisfaction, had been taking in her costume. Her brand new suit from Gray's must necessarily make a favorable impression, her clocked silk hose, her chic Gouratrimmed hat. Mrs. Widderly herself was dressed simply, almost to the point of shabbiness. Strange, Vera thought, when the Widderlys were known to be millionaires several times over. The fact that the United States was at war didn't occur to her in this connection.

But Mrs. Doolan had broken in with the suggestion that it was noon. "Time to knock off work. Do we all 'chow' together to-day?"

Vera raised questioning eyebrows and Mrs. Widderly smiled again. "If the canteen is open we might go now. I'm ready. You get the others," she directed. Then she turned to Vera: "If you care to join us, we have rather a pleasant noon hour—we workers."

"Oh, thanks ——" a bit too eagerly. "Yes indeed. I'd love to."

Lunch with Mrs. Widderly? Vera was very nearly awestruck. Yet that Doolan woman was included too. She didn't like that.

2

Vera found the league dances rather a bore. If

it hadn't been for the daily luncheons, she would have been tempted to take up something else. But, since she had offered to address envelopes in order to be included among the office workers, she was likewise invited to join in the recreation hour.

Mrs. Fenwick Widderly, it seemed, had a son in the service. Accordingly, Vera became all the more Mrs. Widderly's shadow. If she had been of a sensitive nature she might have resented the older woman's polite but utterly impersonal response to her advances. Then, there was Frank Widderly. . . .

Not that she had any definite designs upon him. But all these women with whom she was now associated were far more mature than she, and Vera was anxious to gain an entrée into a younger set. Perhaps an introduction to young Widderly would open the door; one never knew.

She had received an acknowledgment from Mildred Tadd for the vase that she had sent as a wedding gift. The letter had arrived before Vera left Siam and Milly gave her address still as the Fahnstock house. Even though she were living at home, Milly must be socially out of things with that husband of hers; it really wasn't worth while to cultivate her now.

Angela Day, of course, would have been the one to whom she would naturally have turned. But Vera had tried to telephone the old Day mansion, only to find that the wire had been disconnected;

Angela was probably living elsewhere. And Vera simply hadn't the time to attempt further to locate her. No, Mrs. Widderly was near at hand; it was upon her that Vera based her social aspirations.

And all of her energies, all of her thoughts for the future were bound in that one idea: to cast off the ignominy of the hidden past, to be accepted finally by these people whom she so envied and admired. Her success had grown to be almost an obsession with her. She dreamed of it; it was the one thing she lived for.

3

Mr. Edward K. Storm, clubman and self-termed "man-about-town," closed the front door of his opulent gray-stone mansion, and stood on the stoop gazing up at the clear-cut October moon. A long, thin cigar drooped from one corner of his lightly mustached mouth. He had paid well for the cigar; it was a special Montenegran brand. He enjoyed its pungent flavor.

Recently he had dined, in solitary state. His meal had consisted of a combination of excellent home-made dishes concocted by his one hundred dollar a week cook, and a series of exotic delicacies. And he had enjoyed his dinner.

Mr. Storm was, then, in a pleasantly agreeable state of mind as he stood that night before his house. He was usually, however, in the same state. There were for him too few mental convolutions to

cause much inharmony of thought and spirit. People said that he was "clever in his own line," and that meant that he was rather vacuous in any other.

There were several courses of action open to him for the evening. He might go over to the Iris Club, play an innocuous game of backgammon with one of the patriarchs who frequented the place. Or, he could go to a play; there were two or three good ones that he hadn't seen as yet, inveterate first-nighter though he was. And always there were the dances at the Fifth Avenue League for War Relief. The latter choice suited his mood the best.

He strolled toward Madison and turned into the Avenue, a popular air humming itself in his head. How rejuvenating the very thought of dancing to a bachelor of fifty! He had stopped in at the league occasionally before; he considered it good policy. And at the end of each evening he had come away refreshed. Mostly, he watched the younger people from the doorway of the ballroom. But his own stiffness seemed to assimilate their spontaneity.

He arrived at the league between dances. Mrs. Widderly gave him a cool bow as he entered, and he returned it with a gay salute. The hallway was half-filled with couples and there was a sort of bored hush among them, broken by the sound of a calm, well-pitched voice in the adjoining room. The voice was reciting poetry.

On tiptoe, Edward Storm approached the doorway and peered in. A girl was standing on a

slightly raised platform, a tall girl with dark hair piled high, and the bearing of a valkyrie.

Storm watched her a moment, then turned abruptly to Miss Wainbright, standing near. "Who is she? She's magnificent! I'd like to meet her—may I? . . ."

She was beautiful. So aristocratic, so evidently to the manner born. Storm swiftly visioned her at the head of his table, in his lonely dining-hall. Only it wouldn't be lonely if she were there; there would be guests—her friends.

For he was a bachelor of fifty. His hobby was proposing to women who never would have him. But he wouldn't give up trying. He needed a wife of good family.

4

Vera's glance had wandered toward the door during her recitation, and she had seen him. His waxed gray mustaches impressed her immediately. During the applause that followed she noticed that he turned to one of the chaperones and obviously asked her a question. Presently Miss Wainbright brought him over and introduced him. Vera was disappointed that his name was unknown to her.

"You recite very charmingly," he remarked after the chaperone had retired. "Are you a member of the theatrical profession?"

"Oh, no!" Vera replied. (She had already learned from Mrs. Widderly that it was decidedly

not "the thing" to be a professional.) "I simply offered my services to entertain the boys. Poor things! They have few enough pleasures, haven't they?"

She thought him rather absurd in the way that he looked at her. He, himself, was attractive enough, well-groomed, distinguished in a stiff, old-fashioned manner. But he must have been fifty-five or sixty at the least, and it was evident that he was interested in her. His acute gray eyes, which were too small, were at the same time a trifle too calculating. And there was a voidness about the mouth.

The marine band in one corner of the room had struck up "Frenchy." Mr. Storm asked quickly: "Are you dancing this one?"

"I'm supposed to, but I'd much rather not. I'm tired."

"Then ——" he motioned toward the foyer. "Couldn't we find a place to sit?"

Vera agreed loftily and they went out into the hall. Two vacant chairs stood in the crook of the stairway and she sank down indolently into one of them. "I want to do my duty for my country," she sighed. "But sometimes it's hard. My feet!" she extended silver slippers. "They've been stepped on by Tennessee, Oregon, and Arkansas to-night. Those men may be able to fight, but socially they're—hopeless."

He laughed and sat down beside her. His laugh

came easily as though it didn't mean much. "It must be difficult for a girl like you to mix with people of that sort. It's different with those other girls, dancing in there, but you're of another—type. How is it that you're not attending the Vandermore Officers' Club dances?"

"Mrs. Widderly—I think so much of her, and she's president of the league, you know. I couldn't think of deserting her. . . . But tell me—it's my turn to question now,—tell me how *you* happen to be here." She made a gesture toward his mufti. "You surely aren't in the service?"

"No. I—well, it's on account of the Widderlys and the Wainbrights that I'm here, too. Just drop in once in a while. Old friends of mine. Thurlow Wainbright is a member of my club—the Iris."

The Iris Club. This man was a member of the Iris Club, the most exclusive organization in New York. All at once Vera no longer thought him absurd.

"Oh?" It was an invitation for him to talk more about himself; she was interested now. But he didn't take it.

Instead, he rose at the strains of a new fox-trot. "Are you rested? They'll let me dance one or two, I'm sure, even though I'm not in uniform. If you'll do me the honor ——"

She was really tired, but she couldn't afford to refuse him. He led her off stiffly, but with deter-

mination. Half-way across the room he crushed her foot brutally under his own.

"I *beg* your pardon!"

She glanced up sweetly. "It's quite all right!"

Indeed it was. It was almost a pleasure to be trod upon by New York—and the Iris Club.

5

She found out more about him from Mrs. Doolan.

"He's Edward K. Storm, you know. He's an art collector. He knows almost everybody. I don't think so damn much of him, myself."

No, Mrs. Doolan wouldn't. The more Vera saw of this efficient lady, the more she thoroughly scorned her. Particularly since Vera was inclined to be jealous of her. Perhaps because Mrs. Doolan made no attempt to intrude her intimacy upon the other women of the league, they accepted her in a comradely spirit that they never showed to the girl.

But Edward Storm had been exceedingly nice to Vera. He had attended all of the dances since he had met her and always, after the intermission, they had their usual talk and the two final fox-trots together. Lately he had been taking her home to the Vandermore afterward, and their friendship was progressing rapidly.

A few weeks after he had met her, Storm asked Vera to go with them to a dog-show at Roswyn. They were to motor out in his car. Vera accepted the invitation at once.

She had never been to a dog-show, but she had noticed that many of the women whom she was aping had their pictures in the fashion sheets in affectionate poses with their canine pets. She decided that it was quite the decent thing to do, to own a blooded "pup."

He called for her early in the afternoon. His limousine was splendid. She sank back into the cushions in revelling luxury. This car was different from the car that the Hennys had kept. The elegance of this was quiet, altogether conventional.

Although driving on Long Island was pleasant, the dog-show proved a disappointment. Vera and Storm wandered about, apparently appraising the animals, in reality watching out of the corner of their eyes for familiar faces. At last they did spy Mrs. Widderly across the ground, talking to one of the managers. It was a Saturday, and the league was closed after three o'clock, which explained her presence. Vera waved to her, and in spite of the fact that their greetings were acknowledged by only a faint smile in response, Storm insisted that they join the older woman. When they finally made their way across the tent Vera was somewhat relieved to find Mrs. Widderly gone. It might have been embarrassing later to try to explain to Storm Mrs. Widderly's coolness.

Vera turned back. As she did so, she knocked against the table arrangement upon which one of the dogs was being exhibited.

"Oh, look! Isn't he a beauty!"

She didn't ordinarily care for dogs. But this Pekingese caught her. There was something so superbly blue-blooded about him as he sat there calmly eyeing the crowds with those round, soft orbs. And the flatness of his small, squat nose, the long sleekness of his hair! Of his kind, he was an unmistakable nobleman.

"Isn't he lovely? Wouldn't you like to own a dog like that?"

Mr. Storm shook his head. "There's no use wanting to own him. He belongs to Mrs. Widderly, and she wouldn't sell him for anything on earth. He's Ta-Tao, the champion of American Pekingese. His grandfather belonged to the Emperor of China."

Vera gazed down at the dog, an odd smile lifting the corner of her mouth at Storm's words. This tiny "Peke," this mere handful of silk and warm flesh, possessed the very thing that she could never have—patrician lineage. The grandson of the pet of the Emperor of China. . . . How many thousands of years of aristocratic ancestry behind him? Somehow he symbolized all that Vera was striving for, all that she could never truly attain. . . .

Angry blood rose in her cheeks. It wasn't fair! Providence had cheated her—was cheating others in the same way every day. She turned to Storm sharply.

"I want to go, now."

Tractably he led her back to the motor, and helped her in. Not until she felt the comforting softness of those cushions and saw the white orchids in the vase before her, did she regain her usual indifference.

Then—well, what did it matter whether one had or had not the real background, provided one could feign it?

6

And November came, and with it the Armistice. And in December the Fifth Avenue League for War Relief closed its doors for good. Vera was out of work.

She was standing in the dressing-room on that last day, adjusting her hat to the correct angle, powdering her perfect nose. She wanted to look her best so that when she went to say good-bye to the president, Mrs. Widderly might be inspired to ask her to call. Outside, in the foyer, she heard voices. Some of the other women were leaving.

"All right! I'll see you at the Colonial Club, won't I, Ann?"

"Tell your sister that I'm coming over to see her, now that I'll have more time."

"Good-bye! Don't forget the Charity Board meeting, next week!"

Vera sighed. Why couldn't she be like them? It

was so hard for her to break their ranks. They were an almost invincible phalanx. Try as she might, she made no progress.

She had been a misfit in Siam, and here in New York she was hardly more successful. Something was wrong with her, she didn't know what. She had thought herself above her parents' friends, yet she knew that she wasn't on an equal footing with these women whom she wanted as her own friends. It was the eternal struggle to climb one more rung, and the ladder was greased.

Vera found Mrs. Widderly in her private office. She went up to her with her hand extended and with her most charmingly studied smile.

"Good-bye, Mrs. Widderly. I'm leaving, now."

The older woman took her hand. "Good luck! Thanks so much for helping us. It seems strange to think that it's all over now, doesn't it?"

"Yes. I'm sorry in a way. I hope—I hope we'll meet again ——?"

"I hope so." Mrs. Widderly's tone was polite but excessively formal. "Perhaps we shall. One never knows."

Vera took the bit between her teeth. "I'm living at the Vandermore. When you're in that neighborhood, Mrs. Widderly, I'd love to have you ——"

"Thank you," Mrs. Widderly said quickly. "I'll remember."

Hesitating a moment, Vera turned and left the room, her chin high. In the foyer she found Mrs.

Doolan, who had on an ulster and a stiff, mannish hat.

"Going along?" she queried pleasantly. "I'll go, too."

Vera nodded assent but gave no other answer and the woman fell into step beside her as she walked down the block toward the Vandermore.

"Look here," Mrs. Doolan cried presently. "I've watched you ever since you came to us. And I heard you saying good-bye to Mrs. Widderly. Say —you mustn't be sore because she didn't want to adopt you as a daughter. People like us can't expect to run around with people like them, you know. War times are different, but ordinarily . . . So, don't get the society-bee, kid. It isn't worth while."

People like *us* ——! Vera wheeled on her suddenly, her handsome eyes cold with anger. "I leave you here, Mrs. Doolan. And eavesdropping is what I might have looked for in a person of your—standing."

Somewhere, never far from Vera, there was the shade of a man in a striped suit, wearing yellow diamonds. He was a man with a cruel face, and he prompted her to do cruel things. Unfortunately she didn't realize his presence.

She was still angry when she reached her room. Society-bee! The insolence of the woman. . . .

Yet there was still Edward Storm.

CHAPTER IV

1

VERA presently found that Edward Storm was, in fact, her one connection with that upper social stratum to which she had been so anxious to ascend. Although, now that the war was over, she had had no word of any kind from the women in the league, Mr. Storm continued his attentions quite as assiduously as before. And Vera received his advances with a willingness that bordered on a sort of wistful eagerness.

She spent long hours wondering if he were in love with her. Did men of his age ever really fall in love? Yet what did those vague hints mean that he threw out—about being lonely and missing the sympathy of a woman? Vera had had so little experience in affairs of the heart; she had never bothered with men before, because she had never known anyone well, who could have helped her to advance herself. Mr. Storm, she realized, was in a position to aid her vitally and if he were serious it would be very much worth her while to encourage him.

He took her to lunch, to dinner; they attended the first nights of the plays quite regularly. And then, one day, he asked her to tea at his home.

"It'll be perfectly all right," he assured her.

"I've a housekeeper who is—well, she's a middle-aged woman in reduced circumstances. She'll act as a chaperone if you wish."

Vera nodded decorously. The conventional aspect of the situation hadn't occurred to her. As a matter of fact, she considered Storm, himself, an excellent chaperone.

"I've been anxious to have you see my place for a long time," he continued. "I've a collection of *bibelots* that I think may interest you."

She liked that: his referring to his art objects as *bibelots*. It was as if they didn't really matter, and yet Vera knew from Mrs. Doolan that they were worth several fortunes.

"Yes, I'm sure they're fascinating," she replied. "And I've been hoping you'd ask me."

He laughed that too easy laugh of his, and airily swung his cane.

Their afternoon stroll was, as usual, on Fifth. Vera always managed it so that they reached the Avenue at about four o'clock. She wanted to be seen by his friends; she wished to be with him when he bowed to these people to whom, eventually, she hoped he would introduce her.

They turned east at Sixty-third Street. Edward Storm's house was between Madison and Park. It was rather an impressive gray stone building; a bit pompous, like him, Vera thought, and a bit out of date. But it was eminently "upper-class"; she quite approved of it.

He opened the door with his key and she stepped inside.

"Isn't this charming?" She glanced about the tapestried hallway. "It's so wonderful to be in a home. I detest hotel life."

She had her hand to her cheek in the Barrymore pose. Her beauty, ordinarily of the brittle sort, was softened by the dimness of the hall light.

Mr. Storm laughed, but in his narrow, hard eyes there was that calculating gleam. "You like it?" he asked. "I hoped that you ——"

He broke off at the sound of an opening door at the back of the hallway. They both turned. A woman entered, who was dressed in black with severe white collar and cuffs.

"Oh, Miss Henny," Storm turned back to Vera. "This is Mrs. Dwight, my housekeeper, of whom I spoke to you. . . . Miss Henny is here for tea, Mrs. Dwight, so please tell the cook to ——"

Vera bowed coldly; she didn't care for the idea of being introduced to a housekeeper. As she started up the stairs she called back to Storm: "Aren't you coming to show me your treasures? I can't wait to see them, you know."

He followed her eagerly and at the landing ran ahead and flung wide the drawing-room doors. "My little gallery," he said.

He stepped back and she went into the room. It was lined with glass cases in which reposed his various objects. Chinese carved ivory; Persian

pottery; a Barye sculpture; one of Rodin's sketch-books; a piece of gold-work by Cellini; an entire case filled with figurines.

Vera paused before the small clay figures. She had been watching Storm's face; she had seen the light come as they reached this case. "These ——" she cried. "These are exquisite. That one with the gold—I love it!"

He opened the case and taking out the figure to which she had pointed, he fondled it in his dry old hands. "An original. You have excellent taste. A Tanagra." He replaced it. "Come," he said. "Sit over here. You must be tired after our walk, and the exhibition is over."

He led her to a divan by the window, the only piece of furniture in the room. As they seated themselves, Vera murmured: "It must be very hard, all this."

"Hard?"

"I mean—isn't it difficult to get competent servants—people who can be responsible, with whom to entrust these things? How do you manage?"

He laughed. "I don't manage. Mrs. Dwight is trustworthy, but I never let anyone touch these. They're too—too precious to me. . . . No, I have good servants, as far as that goes. But"—he sighed—"they aren't very much company to me."

There he was . . . talking about his loneliness again. Vera speculated. . . . She saw herself at the head of this household, the wife of a

man who had nothing to do in life but collect beautiful things for his own amusement. With her own good looks and with his position . . .

She echoed his sigh. "You shouldn't complain," she remonstrated. "You—with this home—this *real* home. Think of me, eking out my existence in a hotel. Is that an attractive picture?"

"Anything ——" he leaned nearer to her so that the fine wrinkles about his eyes and mouth multiplied under her close scrutiny. "Any sort of picture that had you as its central figure would be more than attractive, Miss Henny."

She drew away. His stilted compliment savored of the old school; a younger man would have put it differently.

"Now let me show you another picture—a beautiful young woman in a charming home, a gracious hostess with a place to entertain her many friends, and perhaps—a husband as a background to her brilliancy. Does that picture appeal, Miss Henny?"

She gazed at him warily. She supposed that he was proposing to her but he had a very stupid way of doing it. "Oh, yes," she replied coolly. "Why?"

"Because"—he came still closer to her—"because I'm asking you to make that picture real, Miss Henny. I want you to come into this house and be its head—as my wife. . . ."

It was out at last, and her future was settled.

She had decided definitely that she would accept him when the time came, if it ever did come. Probably she ought to show some sort of emotion now. But she didn't feel any, unless that satisfaction that comes of accomplishment be counted as emotion.

"Will you, Miss Henny—Vera?"

She couldn't bring herself to call him "Ed." As soon think of calling the Buddha, "Buddy." "Yes, I will—Mr. Storm."

It was fortunate that Mrs. Dwight entered at that moment with the tea. Vera was spared the conventional kiss of affiance, and she hadn't liked the feel of Storm's bony arms about her shoulders.

He didn't seem disappointed in the least. He fell to on the tea and muffins, with an easy laugh. That laugh was beginning to grate. . . . Vera wondered, silently, if she could ever cure him of it.

2

Edward Storm, alone at dinner on the night of his betrothal. Sipping his coffee with a pleased, slightly vacuous smile. Glancing at the empty chair opposite him, with that calculating gleam in his narrow eyes. The clever and discriminating connoisseur, and the half-fatuous, half-vapid lover.

Only during the last two years had he searched for a wife. Before that time he hadn't been in a position to find the sort of woman that he wanted. She must be charming, well-bred, capable, and she must show exceptional good taste in things artistic. It

didn't so much matter about her age. Anything up to forty would do, provided that the other qualifications were met.

He had offered himself first to a Miss Benton. She was an old maid of excellent New York family, who made up for her physical unattractiveness by the choice of becoming clothes. Decidedly passé from the male point of view, she was popular to a degree with the women of her acquaintance. The papers always mentioned her as secretary of clubs and ticket-seller for amateur theatricals. She also did passable work in clay.

The outcome of Storm's courtship of Miss Benton was not according to his expectations. He had gone into the affair somewhat condescendingly, since he knew that the lady in question received no attention from any other men. He advised Miss Berton in regard to exhibiting her bits of sculpture, and she seemed duly appreciative. When, however, he approached the subject of marriage one evening, she broke into sudden, ingenuous laughter, and refused him on the spot. She apologized later for her reaction, but she never explained why she laughed.

After that, he had paid suit to a widow with a title. Failing with her, he had passed on to a débutante. And then, on the heels of the third disappointment, came Vera, and Vera had broken the succession.

He made no pretense even to himself that he was

really in love with her. But he felt a trifle foolishly sentimental. She had youth, and he had lost it. Perhaps, through her, his dry veins would flow again. And she was beautiful. . . .

But for the most part, he was estimating her value to him. She had everything that he wanted; he was delighted with her. As a hostess she would be admirable; he could proudly introduce her as his wife. She was talented, cultured—and the episode of the Tanagra figure had proved her discernment in Art. He heartily congratulated himself upon the termination of his two years' pursuit.

His coffee was finished, and still he sat at the table, imaging Vera across from him, speculating upon the probable impression she would make at a dinner-party.

Mrs. Dwight, his housekeeper, interrupted, in the doorway.

"I beg your pardon. I wondered if you'd mind if I go out this evening? There's a church social, and I thought ——"

Edward Storm laughed. "No. You go out and enjoy yourself." He rose and crossed to her. "I'm in a particularly agreeable frame of mind to-night, Mrs. Dwight. Probably I should have granted whatever you asked me—it wouldn't have mattered what."

"H'mmm ——?"

He twisted his waxed mustache. "Miss Vera Henny has consented to be my wife."

"Oh." Mrs. Dwight's firm mouth became firmer. "You mean the young lady who was here this afternoon?"

"Yes. Wish me joy!"

She hesitated. "Well, I do." Her New England twang became emphatic. "And I guess it's a good thing I'm going to church even if it is only a social —after some of the words that come into my head!"

It was quite natural for Mrs. Dwight to show jealousy. Storm didn't blame her for resenting the prospect of a new mistress. But how much more satisfactory to have his ménage in Vera's hands! After Mrs. Dwight had gone, he continued, in a self-pleased way, to gloat.

3

Their engagement was a short but formal affair. Mr. Storm presented Vera with an enormous blue-white diamond which she accordingly wore on the third tapering finger of her left hand. Announcements of the betrothal came out in the New York papers, which Vera devoured greedily. The date of the wedding was finally set, and she at once began to collect her trousseau.

It was at Mme. Darquenne's one afternoon that she accidentally ran into Angela Day. Vera had just finished standing for a fitting and she was about to leave the shop when someone came dashing after her.

"Vee! Vee! Stop a minute!"

Vera turned at the familiar voice. "Why, Angela! How are you? So nice to see you!"

She contemplated the other girl coolly, curious to mark the changes in her. For this was, Vera saw at a glance, a new and utterly different Angela: there was a light in the frank eyes that hadn't been there before, a tender tremulousness of the lips, a radiance in the expression. Vaguely Vera wondered what had been the causes of the transformation.

"Why haven't I heard from you?" Angela was demanding. "What's the news? Why haven't you written?"

Vera smiled a trifle loftily. "Haven't you read the news? It's been in all the papers. I'm engaged—didn't you know?"

"No—Vera, really? To whom? Do I know him?"

"Edward Storm." Vera shrugged. "Possibly you do—he's a member of the Iris Club."

"No, I don't. But—the Iris Club? Perhaps George Warbridge knows him, then. I must ask him. . . . Vera, dear," Angela took one of Vera's cool hands and pressed it in her own, "I'm so glad you're happy." Her eyes softened. "I—I'm happy, too. I——"

"Miss Day, your hat is ready to try on." A salesgirl had stepped up and made the announcement. "Mme. Darquenne is waiting for you."

"Oh, dear!" Angela exclaimed. "Isn't that too

bad? I wanted to talk to you and now —— But I can see you some other time, can't I? Couldn't we arrange something?"

"I'm being married next month," Vera replied. "Will you come to my wedding? I haven't your address. You've moved, haven't you?"

"Yes. Grandmother and I are living on the West Side now. Three thousand, Riverside Drive, the address is. Do send me an invitation—I'd love to go! Good-bye!" She hurried off, waving a jubilant farewell.

The West Side . . . the Days living on the West Side. Perhaps it was just as well that she had broken off with Angela. Vera frowned as she stepped into Edward Storm's waiting limousine.

4

As she entered the lobby of the Vandermore, Storm came forward to meet her. He had been seated in one of the upholstered chairs, facing the door.

"Ah, my dear, you're here at last. I've been waiting since three o'clock."

"Waiting? Why?"

"I told you that I'd attend to the engraving of the invitations, do you remember? Well, I stopped in at Gareth's to arrange about it and discovered that I didn't know how many we needed. I've made out a list of my friends, and if you'll give me a list of yours, I'll ——"

She felt a numbness about her brain just for the moment. But she regained her presence of mind almost at once. "I'd rather attend to the matter myself, anyway. There's a difference in the size of the paper and in the engraving, so if you don't mind ——? I think I prefer to choose." She made a gesture toward the elevators. "Are you coming up to the sitting-room?"

He assented eagerly.

While the car shot skyward, she studied herself in the French mirror on the side wall. She was satisfied that she had extricated herself from an embarrassing situation with unusual *savoir faire*. It might have been disastrous if she had been forced to tell him the names of the friends whom she intended to invite to the wedding. Milly and Angela . . . there were just two. What would he have thought? Of course at the ceremony there would be so many people, he wouldn't realize which were her guests and which were his own. She had decided not to have their friends separated in the usual way, so that she was safe on that score.

When they were in her apartment, she threw off her hat and fur and sank into a chair.

"I'm tired. I've been standing for a fitting."

He didn't answer. He seemed preoccupied. She noticed that he had kept one hand in his overcoat pocket ever since she met him in the lobby; in the other he carried a large book. He came toward her now, smiling.

"A surprise for you. I ran across this little fellow last week, and I remembered how fond you were of the Pekingese at Roswyn."

He drew his hand from his pocket and with it a tiny, round-eyed puppy.

Vera eyed it askance. "For—me?"

He nodded. "Its father is Ta-Tao, Mrs. Widderly's champion."

She supposed she must be enthusiastic, though she certainly had no desire for the care of a dog. She took the puppy from Storm, and laid him in her lap.

"Oh, thanks. Isn't he cunning!"

On her knees the little Pekingese sat bolt upright, gazing fixedly into her face. He was a tiny replica of his father except that his hair was fuzzier—which gave him a babyish look,—and there was a round spot of white on his flat forehead. He had Ta-Tao's intolerant manner of survey; his soft eyes rested on Vera with a certain contempt.

Edward Storm bent and touched the dog's forehead. "They call him 'White Jade' because of this spot. It's quite unusual. It looks like one of those plaques, you know."

"Yes. Isn't that appropriate!"

She was trying her best to come up to expectations. She wondered whether all her life she would be having to appear pleased with him, when in reality she wasn't. She didn't like dogs at all. Particularly she didn't like this dog.

She let White Jade slip from her lap, and rising, she went to put away her hat and neck-piece. When she returned Storm was sitting on the divan, glancing through the large book that he had brought. The book had colored leaves.

"Come here, Vera, will you, and look at these damasks? Do you think this green is better for the drawing-room, or would you care for a buff, like this?"

She crossed over, and sitting beside him, went through the samples with him. He was having the house done over for her, and she was glad, for it gave them something to talk about without being sentimental. Their engagement seemed quite largely a matter of arrangements. There was the house, and there were her clothes, and the honeymoon to decide upon. Once they were married, she hoped entertaining would take their minds up.

But he kept her eternally long over the damasks. He had a way of deciding definitely on one thing, and just as he rose to go, suddenly changing his mind so that they had to go all through the book and choose again. At last he started off, only to come running back to her door after he had rung for the elevator. He wanted to say good-bye to the dog.

Once more he breathlessly returned. "I nearly forgot ——" he thrust a slip of white into her hand. "The list—my friends, you know, for the wedding. Since you're going to order the invitations ——"

The elevator had come and he was finally gone.

Vera turned back, relieved. The Pekingese moaned softly as she closed the door, and slunk away from her to the opposite side of the room. . . .

A pity that Edward Storm couldn't be more entertaining, as long as she had to marry him. But one couldn't expect everything. She opened the folded list that he had given her: the Wainbrights, Widderlys, Currans, Merediths, Holts,—possibly two hundred names. They were well known, people of whom she had always heard. And they were coming to her wedding!

Her incredible good-fortune struck her more forcefully than ever. She had worked for her success; she felt that she deserved it. And yet—and yet a kind Providence had placed this particular man in her path. The fact that he wasn't young probably meant that he was even more influential.

She took the list and waved it triumphantly at White Jade.

"See this! Who says I'm not—the real thing? I'll make them accept me! I'll ——"

But utter was the scorn in White Jade's hazel eyes.

5

Vera made a great feint that she wished her wedding to be unusual, unique. There would be no attendants, no one to give her away. Nor would

she have a reception immediately following the ceremony; when she and Storm returned from their honeymoon they would entertain extensively, but not until then.

All this, of course, simply because even though she wished she couldn't have had things otherwise. There wasn't anyone whom she could ask to act for this one day as her guardian; there were no girls to have as bridesmaids. And the reception would be far better postponed until a time when the absence of her own friends would be less noticeable.

She had chosen St. Anthony's because it was small and would look more crowded. Now, as she stepped from Storm's motor and made her way beneath the awning up to the church door, she wondered who would be there. An usher met her in the vestibule and took her to the anteroom where she was to await the signal to march down the aisle.

She glanced about. But this room was obviously used as a chapel; there was no evidence of a mirror. At any rate, she knew that she looked well: her veil, caught high at the crown of her head, gave her that goddess-like, Olympian air which she so appreciated in herself. And Mme. Darquenne had taken particular pains that the gown should properly set off that symmetrical splendor of physique. Yes, her wedding clothes became her; she was glad of that.

To-day she stood at the gateway of her brilliant future. When she was in Siam this was what she

had imagined in her most fantastic dreams, and she had made it come true; she had proved forever that one could be master of one's fate.

She chose one of the pews, and spreading out her train, composedly waited. She was anxious for the signal for her to go into the nave, but she felt little nervousness. Only an eager curiosity, though not in regard to Edward Storm. After all, he meant so little in the matter except as a figure-head. But were the Widderlys out there—and the Holts? . . . She must keep her eyes alert and notice who had come. . . .

The usher was at the door and the strains of the wedding march roared forth unexpectedly as he opened it.

"Ready, Miss Henny? Mr. Storm is at the altar."

Vera rose. . . . Who was this usher, and why was he so absurdly excited? . . . She stooped and arranged her train with steady fingers. Then, straightening, her proud head erect, and with measured step, she slowly swung out into the church and started down the aisle.

Half-way to the altar she raised her gaze from the white lilies on her arm. As she did so, she stopped suddenly, and the color in her cheeks heightened to a deep carmine, her eyes became glazed. The church, except for a handful of men and women in the five front pews, was completely empty.

Disconnected thoughts flashed through Vera's mind in that half-second's pause. . . . A horrible mistake. . . . She had come too soon. . . . The Widderlys . . .

Then she realized that those people up in front had turned, that the organ was still roaring its loud insistence, that Mr. Storm was awaiting her at the altar, with his gray mustache waxed more stiffly than ever, and that smile of his . . . a bit frozen.

> Here comes the bride!
> See how she strides!
> See how she waddles from side to side!

The words of the play-song that she had learned on the East Side as a child rang in her ears. Somehow she found herself at the altar and the music had stopped.

"Do you, Edward, take this woman, Vera ——"

The minister's tone was like a chant; he mouthed the words and distorted them unintelligibly. Storm's dry old hand clutched her cool one; his face with its gleaming, hard little eyes, was very near her own.

"I do . . . I will. . . ."

Vera's voice came frigidly calm. She had recovered her composure to all outward appearances. Privately she was still trying to comprehend the situation. A dozen people—and she had sent out over two hundred invitations!

She turned her head away; Storm's breath was on her cheek. A girl had been seated in one of the side pews and Vera met her dark-circled eyes. It was Angela Day, pale, haggard, and stiff-lipped. With a shudder, Vera turned back to Storm. What had happened to Angela—had she suffered some loss? It was like gazing at a death's head to look at her—an ill omen.

"I pronounce thee man and wife."

It was over, and Storm was kissing her, an old-fashioned, osculatory salute, that was eminently formal. Together they started up the aisle, and Vera, passing, roughly made an estimate. There were not over fifteen people in the church. Her wedding was a failure. . . . What did it mean? Grimly she determined that she would soon find out.

CHAPTER V

1

THEY returned to the Vandermore after the ceremony; they were to leave for Lake Placid in the evening. During the few blocks' ride between St. Anthony's and the hotel, there had been few words between them. Storm still wore the frozen look about his mouth; the red spots in each of Vera's cheeks were hard and bright.

But in the apartment, Vera closed the door sharply and faced Storm.

"Give me some explanation. I sent out two hundred invitations to your friends. Where were they? Why didn't they come?"

His calculating eyes met hers. "Where were *your* friends?"

She hadn't thought of his countering her question. "Oh, my friends——" Vera faltered. "Well, you see—a great many of them happened to be out of town. Palm Beach and—and Miami. It was unfortunate."

"Very."

She shrugged impatiently. "But that doesn't answer my question. What's wrong with you that the people you know didn't come to your wedding?"

Her expression, in spite of the softening effect

of white veil and gown, was anything but bride-like. Her handsome mouth firm and uncompromising, her cold eyes angry.

He tried to give one of his easy laughs, and failed. "I'll answer that question if you'll tell me this: why did you marry me, Vera?"

"Oh—what does it matter? What does anything matter now, if you're ——" Her voice held a note of despair. "Yes. I'll tell you why I married you. It was because I thought you knew the Widderlys and the Wainbrights and that you were intimate with them. All my life I've wanted to know people like that. And then you came along, and you asked me to marry you. It was too good an opportunity to let pass."

"But—but you wanted to ——? Why, you spoke of your family as if they had always gone in society! I knew they were dead, but I thought ——"

"I know what you thought. But it isn't true. You might as well understand that now." Vera threw herself dejectedly into a chair. Her veil caught on the carving and she tore it off and flung it aside. "My mother used to keep a boarding-house on East Eighty-fourth Street. My stepfather had money and he sent me to a fashionable school here in New York. Since then I've never been satisfied with the things that I came from."

She had dropped her masque; she was suddenly weary of this useless pretense.

And then White Jade appeared, crawling from

beneath the divan. He stayed as far as possible from Vera, glaring at her with his round, scornful eyes.

She turned to Storm, who was nervously twisting his waxed mustaches. She felt that she disliked him and that miserable dog more than anything she had ever known. "You haven't yet answered my question."

"No." He threw up his hands. "Well, I'm willing to be frank, too. There doesn't seem to be any other way out. I married you for precisely the same reason that you married me. It would be rather funny, if it weren't so—tragic."

"I don't understand."

"You told me that you were working at the league with Mrs. Widderly and I saw you with some of the other women. Of course, in my trade, I become acquainted with these people—but that list that I gave you was really a list of my patrons. I thought that you ——"

"Your trade ——?" Vera's tone was pointed ice.

"Yes. My art objects—I sell them, you know—they appeal to people of that type. But I haven't been successful with them socially. I was hoping that you ——"

"But—the Iris Club?"

He shrugged and twisted one end of his waxed gray mustache. "An affair between Thurlow Wainbright and myself. He owed me several thou-

sand; he put me up at the club, and I let the matter drop. No one knows, of course."

Vera's mind clutched at the startling facts. Edward Storm was a "nobody" . . . he wasn't a dilettante . . . he wasn't even an honorable member of the Iris Club . . . he was an ordinary art-dealer!

"You deceived me, didn't you?"

"Oh, come now," Storm remonstrated. "You deceived me, too, you know."

It was perfectly true. She had tricked him, had made him believe her what she was not. It wasn't for her to accuse him, she saw that now.

"Well, what's to be done?"

He turned to her with that touch of the old school formality. "That rests entirely with you," he replied, adding: "Perhaps—a divorce ——"

A divorce? Didn't he know that a course like that would completely ruin them both? . . .

Across the room, White Jade suddenly sneezed. The sneeze sounded like a laugh. Vera shuddered.

2

In the end she went with him to his house on Sixty-third Street. A divorce was out of the question, she told him; the position of a divorcée was more difficult than any other. She had the feeling ever afterward that she was forcing herself upon him, that he considered he had made a bad bargain and was anxious to try to cancel it.

She hadn't entirely given up the hope of fulfilling her ambitions. During the months following her wedding she sent out a number of invitations to small dinners. They were invariably refused.

Storm had handed over the freedom of his house to Vera; she was absolute mistress, and she used her authority to its capacity. Mrs. Dwight left soon after Vera arrived and the servant problem, without a housekeeper, became complex.

Life, in these days, bored Vera excessively. Storm was never disagreeable, she couldn't complain of his treatment of her. He was simply uninteresting, and old, and she despised him.

Continuing to reach up in every possible way to the plane that she had so nearly attained, Vera's hopes brightened as she came upon George Warbridge's name among the new members of the Iris Club. She pointed it out to Storm.

"He used to be a friend of Mildred Fahnstock's," she explained. "Don't you think you could hunt him up and ask him in to tea?"

Storm nodded eagerly. "I might try. I could stroll in at the club and ask for him. Say that you used to know him, and then just casually suggest his coming over to see you."

Crammed with final instructions, Edward Storm went out the next day, in search of the coveted Mr. Warbridge.

He had no difficulty in finding him. The clubboy led Storm to a large plush chair in one corner

of the lounge, where George was forlornly slumped, looking at a Chicago *Tribune* with unseeing eyes. His cravat was carelessly tied, and there was a button off one of his spats. Storm wasn't favorably impressed by Warbridge's appearance, but he supposed that Vera knew what she was doing.

"Mr. Warbridge?" Storm began. "I'm Edward K. Storm, Vera Henny's husband."

George Warbridge pushed himself to his feet, and peremptorily held out his hand. "Vera Henny's husband?—I'm glad to meet you."

Storm bowed. "My wife tells me that you used to know her years ago when she was in school with Mildred Fahnstock and Angela Day."

"Angela Day? Your wife know Angela Day?" Warbridge's beady eyes fixed themselves upon Storm's face with an impressive stare. "Take me to her. I'd like to see your wife."

This was certainly more than Storm had looked for. He grasped at the opportunity anxiously. "I think Vera's at home now. Suppose we see? It's only a few blocks."

Without waiting for Warbridge to assent, he took him by the arm, and led him out to the door. George had some difficulty in getting into his overcoat and Storm was politely solicitous.

As they walked down the block together, Warbridge talked incessantly.

"I was fond of Angela Day. But she didn't like me. I don't know what was the matter. I loved

her, I did. She was the sweetest girl I ever knew. She ——"

Storm's eyes narrowed. This was an odd sort of chap. To meet a man one minute and to tell him his troubles the next. Probably an eccentric.

"Yes, sir! I've known her ever since she was a little girl, and she was always nice to me. Then all of a sudden she wouldn't see me any more. I don't know why,—what do you suppose is the matter with me, huh?"

For the first time Storm began to realize just what was the matter with George. He edged nearer to him. Unmistakably the odor of liquor emanated from Warbridge. Though he walked as straight as an arrow, he was drunk, nobly, garrulously drunk.

And now, what was there to do? Storm studied the question from all angles. If Warbridge was an inebriate he couldn't be of much use to him and Vera. But if this was a rare occurrence, he might, when he came to his senses, feel it necessary to repay Storm for keeping the matter unknown.

But George decided the problem himself. "She's spoiled my life, she has," he continued soberly. "I was a fine respected member of the community, I was. And now, what am I? I'm an old soak, that's what I am. Nobody likes me. I'm a soak."

He turned to the older man, self-sympathy moistening his small black eyes.

But Storm smiled blandly. "I'm sorry, I'm sure. And—and by the way—I just remembered that my

wife isn't at home this afternoon, after all. She had some sort of reception on, I believe."

"But she used to know ——"

"I'm sorry." Storm perforce shook Warbridge's hand. "Perhaps some other time? Well—good-day!"

Airily swinging his cane he went off, leaving George Warbridge to stare blankly after him.

"But—but she used to know Angela Day!" Weakly, the tears rolled down his stodgy cheeks.

3

Vera was awaiting him at tea. It had been crossly served by a new maid who was leaving the next day. Vera was despondent.

As Storm entered the drawing-room alone, she glanced up. "You couldn't find him?"

"I found him, all right." He recounted his experience. "So, that's just another blind alley, you see," he finished.

Vera passed her hand across her eyes. She was fearfully, bitterly discouraged. "I am the master of my fate ——" had she ever dared to think such a thing? She knew better now. . . .

Still, presently, Vera once more took heart for her struggle. Two things happened that gave her encouragement.

In the first place, she discovered that Alice Clayton was interested in dogs.

Alice was another Shelborough girl, of the same

class as Vera. They hadn't been intimate in school, but Vera had watched the other girl's progress ever since graduation. And now, when Vera saw, in *House and Garden,* that Alice was exhibiting "Pekes," it opened up a new channel of thought to her.

White Jade, now, was almost the age to be shown. With such excellent ancestry, surely he must be worthy. Little as she knew about dogs, she recognized the marks of a champion in him. And when she had him privately judged, her assumptions were proved.

But Vera had no desire to show him. She wanted Alice Clayton to do that part, and she wanted Alice out of gratitude, to introduce her into her own set in society. Vera would give her White Jade, and she would expect Alice to do the rest in return for her generosity.

But how to get hold of Alice? It would seem strange for her to call on the Claytons after all these years. She couldn't do that. Vera racked her brain for a natural way to insert herself into Alice's life.

One day, the morning mail unexpectedly solved the difficulty. The arrival of the invitation to the Shelborough five-yearly reunion. She had forgotten completely about it.

"Dr. and Mrs. Albert De Lancey Shelborough request the pleasure of the company of the class of

Nineteen Hundred Sixteen at luncheon on Friday, May the tenth."

R. S. V. P.

And Alice Clayton would be there! How absurdly simple it would be to interest her in White Jade, to follow up that interest later and to carry out the plan.

If she had never thought highly of Shelborough, Vera appreciated her Alma Mater now.

4

On the day before the reunion, Vera took White Jade out for a walk. She had grown more careful of him, during the last few weeks; she wanted him to be in good condition when she gave him to Alice.

She started out, down Fifth Avenue. It was warm, for May, and she walked slowly, stopping occasionally at the shop-windows. At Scrivener's she paused unusually long. There were some pamphlets on the drama, displayed, that caught her attention. As she was turning away, she saw the name on the cover of a book at one end of the window: *The Upper Ten, by Angela Day*—it stared her in the face. Could that be *her* Angela? There weren't two people of that name, surely. Vera's face stiffened. So, Angela had succeeded. . . . Angela had done what she had started out to do.

Abruptly she stepped inside and bought the book.

If she were to attend the reunion to-morrow, she ought to read the thing before then. Coming outdoors, again, she turned up-town. She would go to the park, let White Jade loose from his leash, and spend the remainder of the afternoon glancing through *The Upper Ten.*

She entered the park at Fifty-ninth Street, and she chose a secluded spot where the children wouldn't disturb her.

"White Jade—come here! I'm only going to set you free!"

Why did that horrid dog always slink away from her? There, now she had loosed him.

She was distinctly disappointed in the book. A tale of society life, and though seemingly it was utterly serious, there was an undercurrent of humor between the lines that appeared to say: "Isn't all this absurd—and futile?"

That point of view irritated Vera. If society was futile, then why was it so monstrously difficult to enter? If Angela had only known the gruelling discouragement of trying to better one's self and always being pushed back, relentlessly balked at every turn!

She stayed on, reading, until the sunlight grew too dim to continue. Then she closed the book, and whistled for White Jade. He came toward her, hesitant, and she slipped the collar over his head.

As she walked across town to Madison, her mind was still occupied with Angela's novel.

What would it be like, she wondered, to be actually one of those people who were born and bred to the sort of life that she was still determined she would achieve? Would one ever really appreciate one's good-fortune? Or would it be taken for granted, possibly scoffed at, as Angela scoffed?

She reached the Avenue, and at the same moment, the leash on her wrist grew suddenly lighter. She glanced down, and saw the empty collar at her feet. White Jade had escaped.

In a rush, it came to her: if she lost White Jade, she lost her ambitions forever. He was the straw at which she was so desperately clutching. Frantically, she looked about, at the stoops of the houses, the doorways of the store, out into the street. . . .

The clang of a trolley, and a streak of bewildered tan fluff on the rail—Vera screamed. It was her future that was going to be ground under those ruthless wheels of the car—her hopes, her very life!

Swiftly she dashed out in front of the trolley, attempted to push the small tan body from the track,—and caught her high French heel in the rail. . . .

A Spiegelschultz, she died.

BOOK III

ANGELA

CHAPTER I

1

To Angela Day, at nineteen, Life seemed a study in black and white. There was no middle tone; a thing was either entirely right, or else it was quite utterly wrong. And she, Angela, knew the difference. Grandmother Day had shown her.

Mrs. Josiah Day, seventy, patrician from her parted, cloud-white hair to her common-sense shoes, was a decisive character. Her deep voice, which had almost the quality of a man's, carried conviction. And she had implanted certain facts in the eager mind of her granddaughter at an early and impressionable age, facts that had adhered and had become a part of Angela. Or perhaps, even more, Angela had become a part of them. . . .

"A thing is either true or untrue. There isn't such a thing as a 'white lie.'

"Don't believe just because your ancestors wore gold lace that you are a superior being. The only good there is in a family tree is to make you ashamed to dishonor it.

"You aren't a beauty, Angela. If any woman tells you that you are, you may be sure she's a backbiter. If any man says you're pretty, you'll know either that he's a flirt or else he's in love with you.

"The curse of this generation is broad-mindedness, which is usually cowardliness. Don't be afraid to be narrow when it comes to a question of morality. . . ."

So, Angela, at nineteen, was not beautiful, and she knew it. She was too pale and her features weren't regular. But her hair . . . she made the most of that. She wore pastel shades that set off its dull terra-cotta lights; she dressed it simply, in a loose twist at the crown of her head, a coiffure that displayed its quantity. And her eyes, wide-set and frank, were of an indefinable color, sad of expression except when she laughed, or when something struck her as amusing. And so far, she had found a great deal in the world that was amusing.

The resemblance between Angela and old Mrs. Day, then, was rather more spiritual than physical. The same stiff New England standards, the same humorous kindliness. But whereas Mrs. Day even in her tenderest moments was abrupt in manner, Angela's attitude was at all times one of gentleness. When she was firmest she was possibly the most feminine.

She had been brought up by Grandmother Day—"Nanna," as she called her. Angela's parents had died of the influenza in 1900 and she could scarcely remember them. Since then, "Nanna" had been mother and father and, best of all, friend. Mrs. Day's vanity concerning her age had made her all the more companionable; she would go anywhere

at any time, if only to prove her constant declaration that no one need think her dead yet, that she was still very much alive, thank you. She had quite as much vitality as Angela, and three times the amount of energy. It wasn't difficult, therefore, for her to be persuaded to take a trip to California once Angela had finished school. It would have been far more difficult to hold her back.

But at first she pretended reluctance. She had never travelled to any extent, nor had Angela. It was a big undertaking. After a series of arguments, of the inevitable outcome of which both Angela and her grandmother were perfectly aware, they finally closed their house. Angela had terminated the debate by the suggestion that the trip might prove too strenuous for the older woman. They had started west almost immediately after that.

Chicago, first; they only stayed three days. Mrs. Day adored the theaters—there were several plays running that were due to open in New York at a later date and she felt as though she were beating time to have already seen them. Then, too, she would have been perfectly content to spend a week simply wandering about Marshall Field's. But Angela was impatient, and they had decided, by mutual consent, to leave and go on, as soon as one or the other tired of any place.

"Nanna, Chicago is such a 'try to be'—I hate it. Like a high school girl dressed up in 'vampire'

style. Let's go somewhere that is just itself—and different from New York."

They moved on to San Francisco. But here Mrs. Day was dissatisfied.

"So many Chinamen and all kinds of yellow people leering at you if you step out of the hotel. Ugh! Might as well live in Asia and be done with it!"

Not until Santa Barbara did the Days find California. Then month hazily succeeded month and they were lost in the joy of shadowy eucalyptus trees against the turquoise of sky and sea. Only the keenest necessity at last brought that heavenly interlude to a close. And then, simultaneously, Angela's vision of life took on more neutral tones.

2

But not the tropical scenery, nor even the quaintness of the town was all that kept Angela in Santa Barbara. She was interested in people, first and foremost; her chief diversion had always lain in the study of character. Here she found an excellent, a willing victim. And she found Margerie.

The hotel where Mrs. Day and she had intended to stay was, they found, a mile inland. They accordingly went to a small boarding-house on the beach. But after their first meal they were decidedly glad that they had made that choice, even though the food was somewhat unbalanced as to calories and somewhat scant as to quantity.

There were eight at dinner that night; six at the

larger table. Mr. and Mrs. Joyce, a young married couple, were charming, frivolous motor enthusiasts. Their little girl, Margerie, ate at a small table in the corner, with her colored nurse. Angela secretly made eyes at the child, and during the meal they exchanged giggles. She was a fascinating elf, plump, with straight yellow hair and ruddy skin, and she had a loud, boisterous laugh that seemed to annoy her young mother.

Then there was a Miss O'Brien, who spoke seldom and was given to staring. Mrs. Joyce told Angela later that she was a retired motion picture actress. Extremely thin, with purplish rouge on her drawn and wasted cheeks. Angela tried, thereafter, to avoid her as much as possible; there was nothing particularly interesting about her, she was a common type. But there was something rather repugnant; it was as if she had painted her face with her cosmetics, like a bill-board, simply to advertise the sort of woman that she was.

But Derek Porter Seville. . . . They hadn't been seated five minutes before Angela nudged her grandmother under the table and glanced hard in his direction. As though anyone could possibly have overlooked him.

It was young Mrs. Joyce who had spoken first. She leaned across her husband, who was seated between Mrs. Day and herself and asked with a pretty, but forced smile:

"You had a pleasant day to travel, didn't you?"

Mrs. Day, who had been occupied at the moment in trying to decide whether it was noodle soup or a mistake in the consommé, looked up with a start.

"Oh—yes, yes. Quite."

"Which way did you come—from the south or north?"

"San Francisco."

"San Francisco!" Mrs. Joyce's pretty, vapid face showed polite interest. "Really?" She gave an upward glance at her husband. "That's our home," she smiled.

Mrs. Day endeavored to mirror her interest, though inwardly she felt no particular excitement over the news. And Mrs. Joyce's husband broke into the dialogue.

"How did you like San Francisco?"

A simple question in itself, but for a truthful woman, a sticker. Mrs. Day coughed to gain time.

"Of course it's—why, it's ——" she glanced helplessly at Angela.

"You see we were there such a short time, we didn't really get to know San Francisco," Angela interrupted quickly. "Sometime we'll have to go back and become better acquainted."

The Joyces smiled across at Angela, who smiled blandly back, and Mrs. Day gave her a look of open admiration. There was silence again until the next course, when Mrs. Joyce once more opened the conversation.

"I think we ought to introduce ourselves, don't

you?" she asked sweetly. "It's awkward, not to know one another's names. . . . I'm Mrs. James Joyce. My husband, Mr. Joyce."

"My name is Day. Mrs. Josiah Day. And this is my granddaughter, Miss Day."

Mrs. Joyce acknowledged the introductions and went on with her presentation of the two other guests.

"Mrs. Day and Miss Day—Miss O'Brien. And Mr. Seville—Mr. Derek Porter Seville."

She slid over the introduction of the actress and passed quickly on to the young man. At his name he twittered an eager, "How do you do—charmed, I'm sure—how do you do?" and half rose from his seat.

He was, in fact, a twittering sort of young man. Small, slight, smooth-shaven, with pink cheeks and nervous gestures that were dainty, like those of a woman. When he raised his glass to his cupid's-bow lips it was as though it were a chaliced flower. He was probably twenty-eight or thirty, Angela decided, though at first glance he looked almost a boy. And it was evident that he considered himself irresistible from the point of view of the opposite sex.

He began on Angela almost at once, much to her private delight. Under cover of the conversation which had recommenced between the Joyces and Mrs. Day, he turned to her.

"Is this your first visit to California? Isn't it charming? I simply revel in the palms and

oranges, don't you? You must let me motor you about."

"Thanks." Angela tried to keep her eyes sober. "Yes. It's our first trip. And I do—love it."

"I came up here from Los Angeles. Rather fagged out, I was—overwork, the doctors told me. But a month of this air. I say! It puts the red blood in a man's veins, you know. I believe I could move some of these fascinating old purple mountains, eh?"

His voice, naturally high, broke when he waxed enthusiastic. Miss O'Brien had fixed him with a hard glare that was full of a superior scorn, but he was completely engrossed with Angela.

"And you must let me take you through the old mission. Have you 'done' any of the missions? No? How wonderful! You'll adore this one. Quite a remarkable specimen, with the real monks in costume, and all that sort of thing. Oh, fascinating!"

He went on to describe the beauties of the surrounding country, making his remarks, impersonal though they were, seem almost like direct compliments by his flatteringly attentive manner. Angela drank in his conversation, led him on with a quiet, appreciative word now and then. . . . If only Nanna would listen to him, instead of talking to the Joyces, who were pleasant enough, but just like everyone else.

Later, in their room, Angela sat on the bed and

rocked back and forth in convulsive mirth as she repeated his words to her grandmother.

"'How adorable! Isn't it fascinating? Oh, charming!'—Nanna, you missed it! And he seems to have deigned to flatter me with his august attentions. If only ——" she paused and cast her eyes with mock seriousness heavenward. "If only I can 'hold' his love for a little while. I'd hate to lose him now—he's too rich—glory!"

"Be careful the man doesn't really fall in love with you," Mrs. Day warned drily. "Sometimes they make a fearful fuss when they're rejected. Don't get in any deeper than you mean to."

But Angela laughingly started to undress. "Don't worry, darling."

She unpinned her hair and it fell in a reddish aura about her pale features.

"And did you see that darling child?" she demanded presently. "Oh, I'm going to like this place, Nanna," she declared. "I *know* I'm going to like this place!"

3

Long after Angela fell asleep that night, Mrs. Day lay quietly in the dark.

She had brought up her granddaughter strictly, and the time had come when she must learn a more complete independence. For, fight as she would against old age, Mrs. Day felt most definitely the approach of its outstretched hand. Angela, some-

time in the future, might very probably be left alone; they must be prepared for that emergency.

The question of how to effect this change had been a puzzling one. There was always the possibility of sending Angela away to some unconventional western college. But with the ever-shortening years ahead, Mrs. Day was greedy for her granddaughter's company.

The suggestion of the trip to the coast had been the solution of the problem. Mrs. Day put all the finances of the entire journey into Angela's hands. Angela was to arrange for accommodations at the hotels, to make all train reservations. That was the beginning of the school of independence.

But Santa Barbara offered a different sort of pedagogy. Here was a group of persons, nicely assorted, an ideal number of strangers by means of whom Angela could learn the art of choosing friends. All sorts of events might come out of her contact with these people; if her grandmother watched, putting in a word of advice but never actually interfering, perhaps this might prove the very sort of training that Angela most needed to complete her course.

"I'm going to like this place, Nanna. I *know* I'm going to like this place. . . ."

Mrs. Day turned on her side and closed her eyes. She prayed that Santa Barbara might like Angela, might be of benefit to her in strengthening and tautening the supple lines of her character.

4

From the first, Angela and her grandmother fell into a routine. Mrs. Day passed her mornings "hiking" along the shore; her afternoons she spent pleasantly on the boarding-house porch, with a bit of fine embroidery. She was immensely proud of her excellent eyesight; she scorned anything but the most delicate handiwork.

And Angela read. Read all the things that she hadn't had time for during the years that Addison's *Spectator, The Odyssey* (in translation), *The Canterbury Tales, The Vicar of Wakefield,*— had been forced upon her unwilling intellect.

Hardy, Meredith, Henry James, she read them all with a hungry eagerness. Particularly Henry James. For he never stepped beyond the bounds of even her own rigid conservatism. Wells, she liked—with reservations. But she didn't trust him; he was likely to be outrageous without warning. Mr. James, though, was like a member of the family; he was altogether safe and one could quite depend upon him.

But the study of life was far more interesting than that of fiction, always.

She spent her mornings in the sand, playing with Margerie Joyce. Mr. and Mrs. Joyce motored most of the time, and left the four-year-old child in the care of her indolent colored nurse. Angela found herself watching the gyrations of the immature mind, trying to comprehend it, trying at times

to guide it into the right channels; to interpret life to the small intellect in simple, truthful terms,—a difficult, absorbing task. It made Angela wonder how a mother like young Mrs. Joyce could possibly leave her child in the ignorant care of the colored nurse. How she could pass days away while her baby was spending the love that should have been hers upon an utter stranger like Angela, herself! It was unbelievable.

"Build me a howus an' den tell who does live in it!"

Margerie's demands were insatiable, but Angela didn't mind. The feel of the child's warm body wriggling in her arms, the sound of her gurgling laughter and "Oh, dat's funneee!" in her happy baby voice were reward enough. For Margerie was the first child that Angela had ever really known. Before, she had stared at the babies in Central Park with longing eyes, but that was as near as she had come to them.

Nothing could have induced Angela to give up her mornings with Margerie. Nothing, that is, except the presence of Miss O'Brien. Once she had gone to the beach and had found the actress down on her thin knees, beside the child. And she had seen Miss O'Brien bend swiftly and kiss one of the ruddy round cheeks. Angela had shuddered at that, and had gone silently away. It seemed so dreadful that such a woman should touch Margerie. . . . Angela couldn't endure the sight.

She saw a great deal of Mr. Seville. He took her frequently to the grill of the larger hotel in the evenings; his dancing was in accord with his other graces. Then she went motoring with him in his low-slung, mauve-colored car. But she enjoyed him most of all when he sat beside her in the sand and talked to her in his high, excited voice of Life and Art and all the other abstract things that begin with capitals.

He followed her down to the beach one day about a month after her arrival in Santa Barbara. She was reading, and his narrow shadow fell across the pages of her book.

"I'm going to be a perfect pest. I'm going to interrupt you."

He tossed a brief-case that he was carrying on the sand, and flung himself lightly down, with a delicate sort of abandon. "Will you think me most awfully rude?" he twittered. "Fact is, I'm lonesome, you know."

Angela closed her book and turned to him with smiling eyes. "As bad as that?"

"Oh, infinitely worse!"

"Well, there's always Grandmother. She was on the porch embroidering. You needn't have come way down here for company—if you simply wanted someone to talk to."

"Don't be so practical, dear Miss Day! You know why I came here. I wanted to talk—to you."

His tone was so replete with sentimental meaning

that Angela almost laughed. But she turned away and studied the horizon sternly in order that he might go on.

He began again presently. "The blue of your frock exactly matches the sea, to-day. Did you know?"

"Yes." Angela nodded without turning. "I took a small bottle of it with me when I bought the dress."

"Ha!" Mr. Seville gave his high laugh. "You're *so* ironical! But, seriously though—I love cool shades. Pleasant, unemotional colors like that of the sea and the gray of this sand, don't you?"

"Uh-huh."

"Here in California things are so vivid. Crimson, purple, jade-green. I love it too—for a change. But I wonder if so much brightness wouldn't pall in a lifetime? You like California, don't you?"

For the first time Angela turned to him with earnest enthusiasm. "It's heavenly. It's like a dream. Not the Freudian kind, but the real thing, the sort they write song-ballads about. It's all perfect—except for the movie-people."

"You object to them?"

"Decidedly. . . . We saw a great many of them in San Francisco—I suppose we shall see even more in Los Angeles. But even they ——" she waved them aside with one slim, straight-fingered hand. "Even they can't spoil this loveliness!"

"Did anyone ever tell you that you'd 'screen'

well? I should think you would." He harped back to the personal again.

Angela shrugged. "Acting is about the last thing I'd care to do—even if I could. Sometime—I—I want to write. I'm not ready yet. I don't know enough. But some day ——" she broke off. "Mr. Seville, I've suspected you since the first—you're a writer, aren't you?"

He started and the pink in his cheeks deepened. "Mercy, no!" he exclaimed. "Whatever gave you that idea, Miss Day?"

Angela couldn't very well reply that she had never met any writers, but that she had always imagined them to be about as queer as he, so she pointed toward his brief-case. "Well, you carry that around so much. And sometimes I've seen you glancing through typewritten manuscripts. I just thought ——"

"Oh, no." He made a large gesture that was, nevertheless, exquisite. "I'm—I'm more by way of being an artist," he explained.

He was opening the brief-case and she rather hoped that he was going to show her some of his work. But he only pulled out a newspaper. "You're a New Yorker—do you care for *The Tribune?*" It was obvious that he was anxious to change the subject. "This is a recent copy."

At the name of the paper, Angela's face brightened, and she took it delightedly.

"*The Tribune* is our regular paper. I haven't

seen it since San Francisco—and this is the fifteenth, only five days ago!" She glanced through the headlines and a frown came between her brows. "It looks as if we were actually going to get in the fight before long. It's depressing to read the papers—it's so certain that we ought to go in with the Allies. And yet—and yet—we can't seem to get up the courage to send our own to be killed—or at least the authorities can't." As she opened the papers she exclaimed more lightly: "There's F. P. A.—he usually has something cheerful to say, even if he doesn't appreciate my literary efforts."

"I say! Did the beastly fellow 'zinc' you?"

"The beastly fellow did."

She turned to the editorial sheet and as she folded it back, her eye caught a headline on the society page:

Fahnstock Elopement a Surprise to Younger Set

"Why! That must be Malcolm Fahnstock, he—no! It's—it's Milly!"

The shock of the news came with almost dazing force. Angela dropped the paper, turned toward Mr. Seville blankly.

"You know her?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes—Milly. She—she's married. Ran away with a clerk of the Mawosta Inn. She's only seventeen. It seems rather terrible, doesn't it?"

Her words inadequately expressed the feeling that she experienced at the thought of Mildred

Fahnstock, married. Little Milly! She was hardly more than a child. . . . Somehow, it was as if Milly had left port before her vessel was quite seaworthy . . . and on that perilous voyage . . .

"Elopements are so romantic—aren't they? I think that when two people find that they love each other and that they ——"

But Angela rose abruptly and suggested that they start back to the house. Mr. Seville, for all his falsetto ardor, didn't seem amusing just then.

5

"Angela, why don't you make an effort to be a trifle nice to that actress girl?" Mrs. Day's deep voice had made the suggestion not unpleasantly. "I wouldn't want you to have her for a bosom friend, naturally, but I don't think she's very well, and maybe you could cheer her up."

"But—but she's so dreadful!" Angela had expostulated. "All that rouge and those fearful, 'shaped' eyebrows of hers. I think she's disgusting!"

But then something had occurred that changed Angela's feeling toward Miss O'Brien and made her thoroughly ashamed of her former attitude. As she told her grandmother afterward: "Nanna, I've been a horrid, impossible moral snob. And I've no reason to be. I'm—I'm just no good in a lot of ways. But I've learned this lesson. . . ."

It had all happened on the day preceding the departure of Angela and her grandmother. The events, in fact, had precipitated their leaving Santa Barbara sooner than they intended.

An unusually cool summer day. A brilliant sun and the air as clear and keen as cut crystal. Mr. Seville had been waiting for such weather; he had been anxious to take Angela in his car up on a hill to a particular point of vantage, so that she might get a view of the Pacific and of the shore north and south.

Lying back in the car, tightly wrapped and veiled, Angela blithely drank in the cool, pungent breath of the palms as the motor made its ascent through the woods.

"It's so dense you can't see on either side. And listen ——!" Derek Porter Seville chirped with excitement, as he clutched the wheel with his nervous hands. "Except for the engine there isn't a sound!"

"Quite remarkable, isn't it?"

"I say! Yes, isn't it, though? It—it gives one the idea, somehow, that here in the 'forest primeval' one is singularly alone—eh? Sort of a feeling of remoteness from civilization."

Angela laughed. "But it won't be for long. We'll come out in the midst of a millionaires' settlement soon. We always do, around here."

"Aha! Wrong guess. Close your eyes and in a moment ——"

With a mighty effort the motor swung heavily around the last curve and suddenly reached a clearing; they were at the summit of the hill.

"Oh!"

Angela's wide mouth drew itself into a red cipher at the glory of the panorama spread, like a gift of a dramatic Jehovah, at her feet. But Seville brought her back to the commonplace with a thud.

"See! Down there is the identical spot where we sat together yesterday afternoon. And if that isn't Miss O'Brien there, now!"

She followed his gaze to the beach below where a brightly dressed figure half-reclined in the sand. And not far off a small fleck of pink was wading in the frilly edge of the Pacific, while a larger, blacker shape sat watching in the distance.

"It's Margerie!" Angela exclaimed, indicating the tiny blot of pink. "Ooooo-hoooo! Margerieee!" She put her hands to her mouth and called down, and Seville waved frantically.

The rosy fleck stopped, looked about, and suddenly waved back, jumping up and down.

"You're fond of children, aren't you?" Seville said presently.

"Isn't everyone—at least to a certain extent?"

"To a certain extent—yes, I suppose so. But you—well, a man can tell that you're the sort of girl who would love children and a home and all that. I think it's very—wonderful. I've never

known a girl like you. The girls I've been thrown with have been so—different."

"I've shown you an example of a very common type, then. I assure you, Mr. Seville, I'm not in the least unusual, much as I might like to be." Angela guardedly threw her tone into the practical, though her humorous instinct was to let him proceed.

But he went on, regardless of her attitude: "I think you're really quite—quite—I mean, you're—Miss Day—Angela ——!"

This was going farther than he had ever dared before, and Angela's frank eyes turned toward him, wide open, a trifle surprised.

"I—I ——"

A scream, a thin, penetrating scream interrupted him. Angela and Seville turned hastily back to the beach below.

"Oh—my God! My God!" It was Seville's high voice, completely uncontrolled. "The child—she'll go under! She'll ——!"

Below them, on the sand, a dark figure of a colored nurse rocked back and forth in an agony of helpless fear, and beyond, a struggling flash of pink bobbed among the breakers.

Angela laid a firm hand on the hysterical man's arm. "Quick! Start your car! We must go down—quick!"

But as the motor jerked to a start, Angela saw the bright-colored form of the actress rush to the

edge of the water and fling itself unhesitatingly into the sea.

"Thank God!" Angela murmured. "Oh, thank God!"

6

When they reached the shore Miss O'Brien was staggering along the beach with the inert child in her arms. Her dark, wet hair clung to her rouge-smeared cheeks like black seaweed, and she was coughing weakly. The panic-stricken nurse stood in the foreground, making no effort to assist, wailing with aboriginal frenzy.

Angela sprang from the car, ran to the actress, stripping off her own heavy motor-coat.

"Lay her down and then you put this on. We've got to work over her." She turned to Seville. "Go for a doctor at once!" And to the frightened nurse: "Stop crying and rush for some dry clothes. Hurry!"

Now that she touched Margerie's small cold body that was so unresponsive, Angela was afraid, horribly, terribly afraid. But she kept repeating to herself: "I *mustn't* lose my head! I've got to bring her back—somehow—I've *got* to!"

"Now, Miss O'Brien, watch me a moment!"

It was rather like an undistinguished sergeant commanding a private who had won a war cross . . . even at the time Angela realized the difference. But someone must arrange things, and the actress, after her flash of heroism, had subsided

to a weary silence, punctuated by short, spasmodic coughs.

Somewhere, someone had taught Angela the rudiments of First Aid . . . the principles were vague, but . . . She took the cold hands and raised them high above the baby's head, then out to the sides, then down,—steadily, rhythmically.

One, two, three . . . one, two, three. . . . Suppose that this had been her child—her own little girl! She would be able to call her back in some way, to snatch her away from the clutching grip that held her, she would . . . ! One, two, three . . . one, two, three. . . . If only there were some sign, some trifling sign of hope! She was cold, cold and sickeningly limp . . . one, two, three. . . . Margerie! Margerie darling ——! But there was no movement; it was her own efforts that had made the pale face jar . . . one, two, three . . . one, two, three . . . one, two, three. . . . Why didn't the doctor come? Oh, Lord, why didn't he? . . . one, two ——

"Now, Miss O'Brien, you do what I am doing." Angela stepped aside quickly and made a gesture for the actress to take her place. "And I'll try to start her breathing by pressing on her ribs. Now—steady—one, two, three ——"

Together they worked over the child, silently, awkwardly, tenderly. And Margerie lay like a white-faced doll, hopelessly unresponsive.

"She don't seem—to have any—'come-back'—poor—little kid!" Miss O'Brien gasped between strokes.

Angela's lips were unsteady, but her hands were firm in their movements. "I—I hope she isn't going to die!" she said simply.

It seemed like hours; it seemed like weeks—but it was really hardly more than fifteen minutes. And at the end of that time, Margerie quite unexpectedly fluttered an eyelid, just as the doctor at last arrived; and two weary girls fell into each other's arms and laughed, and sobbed together.

7

Angela rapped softly at Miss O'Brien's door, later in the evening. The actress had a hall-room up under the eaves of the house.

"Come in."

Entering, Angela found the actress propped up in bed, her damp hair spread out on the pillow to dry.

"I've brought you some cough medicine. Nanna happened to have some. How do you feel?"

"Oh, well enough. Course, I shouldn't have acted up that way this afternoon. I mean—according to health."

"You aren't—very well. Are you?"

Miss O'Brien tapped her chest in a matter-of-fact manner. "I've got trouble in here. Doctor told me I'd have to go to Colorado to get well. But

Colorado costs money to go to from Los Angeles. And stay years—that's what he told me. But I couldn't afford to do that, of course. I've got to get back to the city in a month or so."

Angela's eyes softened. "And you did that—this afternoon, knowing that you ——"

"Say ——" Miss O'Brien's voice cut in somewhat harshly. "You take an awful lot of interest in me, all of a sudden, don't you?"

Angela blushed. "Well, I—I ——"

"Yeh. I didn't notice you hanging around me before this. You'd run like the plague was after you every time you'd see me. And do you know" —the actress clasped her thin arms about her knees and bent forward earnestly—"do you know, I thought that first night that I was going to get a chance at a girl like you, as a friend. It—it kind of thrilled me. Like as if I was the peasant girl in the fairy tale, and you were the princess. . . . Well, you were a princess, all right. So royal that you couldn't be bothered with a person like me. Oh, I don't blame you."

"I'm so—sorry," Angela stammered. "I—I was—awfully thoughtless. But please—can't we be friends now? Is it too late? I want to be—truly."

Miss O'Brien caught Angela's extended hand and gave it a boyish pat. "All right, you're on." Then she laughed suddenly, and her laugh wasn't happy; it was tired, and a trifle bitter. "You thought I

didn't know what you thought of me, didn't you? But I did, and I guess you were about right. Maybe I haven't been so good, and maybe I'm not. And maybe, too, I didn't have any nice old grandma to always tell me things, and show me what was what. It makes an awful lot of difference, I can tell you!"

"Yes," Angela admitted humbly. "I can see that it would."

"And you ——" Miss O'Brien shook back her damp locks impatiently. "You're the kind of a girl that somebody'll always take care of. You're used to it, and so somebody always will. Well, I'm going to look after you now. That is, seeing we're friends."

Angela frowned. "But I don't understand. You, look after me?"

"Just exactly." Miss O'Brien took her arm and pulled her closer to the bed. "Listen, kid. You're all right, and I know it. And you don't want to be going around with a married man—and that's what Seville is."

"Married!" Angela started back. "Why, but how do you know? It can't be—he ——"

"Oh, I know, all right. He used to be art director for the Cinema Players Company. I've seen his wife around the studio often. He wouldn't know me—I was only an extra, then. But I know him—know him well enough not to trust myself within a mile of him."

"Why, but he's ——" Angela started to protest.

"Yeh. He's been safe enough for you—so far," Miss O'Brien agreed. "But he took to you from the first, I could see that—probably liked that 'princess' style of yours—thought you were class, maybe. I don't know. . . . But anyway, take my advice and just clear out. That's the thing to do, clear out."

"I—I didn't know. I've been an awful fool. . . . Thank you. . . ." Angela's face was white, bewildered. Turning abruptly, she went out of the door and back to her own room.

Mrs. Day was sleeping quietly and Angela entered without awakening her. She went over to her own bed and sat down on the edge.

A variegated series of sensations swept her, but uppermost was the feeling of humility. That she should have scorned this girl without taking into consideration the differences in their advantages, in everything that went to make them the people that they were! That she should have done, herself, in her innocent stupidity, what she would have condemned in Miss O'Brien! "I didn't understand," Angela murmured. "I didn't know. . . ."

The thought of Mr. Seville brought only disgust. She would take the actress' advice; she and her grandmother would leave immediately. Instinctively, she tiptoed about the room, gathering up their belongings, packing them in the trunks. And while she worked a plan was formulating in her

mind. A plan at least partially to redeem herself in her own eyes, to relieve the injury that she had done the other girl.

Late that night she crept up-stairs to Miss O'Brien's room and softly tucked an envelope under the door:

"This is to say good-bye and—thank you.

"These travellers' checks I hope you'll use for a trip to Colorado. But please don't think I'm trying to repay you for what you've done. I only want you to accept this in the spirit of our friendship, for then I shall know that you forgive me.

"There isn't any way that I can apologize to you. I simply want you to know how terribly sorry I am that I hurt you."

Henceforth, for Angela, the black and white that had so clearly defined her image of things was melted into a softer, gentler gray. . . .

But now that she was about to leave Santa Barbara so suddenly, she felt an ache in her heart at the thought of losing Margerie. She hadn't appreciated before, how much the companionship of that little girl had meant to her. Would she find other children later on, who would take Margerie's place? Angela began to realize that there had been a waiting space in her life, and that Margerie had partly filled it.

CHAPTER II

1

In Los Angeles Mrs. Day and Angela found a city that delighted them both.

"I never saw so many good-looking clothes in my life! Why go to Paris?"

Angela's pleasantest hours were rounds of shopping: Hamburger's, Robinson's,—all the more exclusive shops on Seventh Street. She had finally to buy a new trunk in order to accommodate her purchases.

But Mrs. Day's particular penchant proved to be trolley trips. She left none of the beaches and near-by resorts unvisited. And sightseeing busses. Angela at last pleaded for mercy on that point.

"I don't see why you don't hire a touring-car, Nanna dear. The chauffeurs on these 'rubber-necks' are fiends. When I'm not in terror at their recklessness they are simply deafening me, bawling out the names of the different studios."

"Nonsense!" Mrs. Day scoffed. "You don't have nearly the fun if you go by yourself. For instance—that young married couple that sat next to us on the trip to Riverside. They were much more interesting than some of the scenery. And that travelling salesman from Oswego. No, I much prefer the busses!"

Yet, for all their seeming enjoyment, there was a troubled undercurrent, a sort of dangerous suspense about those outwardly placid March days.

U. S. Assailed in Reichstag on Sea Issue.
Preparedness—Are We Prepared?
Wilson to Demand Full Disavowal From Berlin.

All the newspapers pointed to but one thing now,—war. The black eagle of Imperialism had flapped its insolent wings too tauntingly; the fighting spirit of the easy-going people of the United States had at last been aroused; they had cast off their thoughtless good-nature, and were standing shoulder to shoulder, sternly awaiting the final call to arms.

Angela and Mrs. Day read the papers with few comments. They were in California supposedly for a pleasure trip; neither one wished to suggest returning home until it was absolutely necessary. But in the back of each mind the menacing fact dominated, and a letter from George Warbridge to Angela unexpectedly settled the question of their course of action.

To hear from him, in the first place, was a surprise. They weren't in the habit of corresponding, he and Angela. They met, infrequently, at dances and other affairs given by their common friends, and outside of that they seldom saw each other. Angela had often wondered whether George actually disliked her. But then, he had been so

deeply in love with Mildred Fahnstock; it wasn't strange that he had shown no particular interest in the rest of the girls.

His letter was friendly enough. He started off with all the news of Mildred's wedding that he had been able to gather. Angela had heard from Milly once since her elopement; Milly, it seemed, was living at home for the present while she hunted for an apartment. But it was splendid to know from an outside source that she was happily married. Angela was relieved.

"I haven't seen her, but I had a note from her while she was on her honeymoon. And I met Mr. Fahnstock at lunch the other day. He told me that Henry Tadd was a fine chap and he seemed much pleased over the whole affair. But we'll miss Milly in the old 'bunch,' won't we?

"Maybe there won't be any 'bunch,' though, if things turn out the way they seem to be going. All the fellows have got together lately for military training. We meet two nights a week at one of the armories. And the girls are getting up Preparedness Parades and all kinds of things. Some of them are going to organize a motor corps. I think everyone feels that there will be war now within a very few weeks."

It wasn't that George's letter told them anything that they didn't already know. Simply that the fact that the whole country was at the edge of a precipice became the more apparent because it struck home.

Angela had known George Warbridge since kindergarten days; she had a genuine affection for him. Since she had "put her hair up" their friendship had become more casual. But as children, they had been splendid chums.

George wasn't deep or interesting, from one point of view, and Angela had always suspected him of a certain amount of weakness of character, for all his stolid appearance. But he was a dear in a great many ways, and to know that he and those other young people with whom she had grown up were patriotically working, while she was passing frivolous days in the Summer-Land—it made her decision to return to New York inevitable.

Angela folded the letter which she had been reading aloud to her grandmother in a secluded corner of the hotel writing-room.

"Nanna, I'm sorry——" her frank eyes were troubled. "I know how you love it here. But honestly, don't you think——?"

"Think?" Mrs. Day laid down her embroidery and looked up. Her deep voice boomed out surprisingly in the quiet room. "Angela, did you ever know me to want to be out of the thick of things? Thank heaven, you've spoken at last! I thought you never would!"

2

Angela received one more letter before leaving

Los Angeles. It was a note from Vera Henny's cool hand:

"I had hoped to return to New York before this, but there are so many attractions at home that I find the days passing almost before I know they are gone. My recitations are surprisingly popular here. I gave them *Ozymandias* at a special performance one afternoon, and the applause quite overcame me.

"My dear, isn't it dreadful about Milly's elopement? When I read the account of it in one of the magazines, it took my breath away. That was the first I had heard of it—I think she might have let us know more delicately.

"Of course Mildred has always done foolish things, but I never thought she would sentence herself for life—with a *hotel clerk!* I suppose there's a chance that the Fahnstocks could push him by means of their own prestige, but I doubt if they could do even that. No, I'm afraid poor Milly is done for. But I do think she might have shown more sense."

This point of view was something new to Angela. She had thought it very dreadful that Milly should have married, but only on account of her extreme youth. Mildred was such an infant! She really hardly knew her own mind as yet.

But the idea of Henry Tadd as socially ineligible hadn't occurred to her. If Mr. Fahnstock thought him nice, he undoubtedly was nice, and that was the end of it.

Vera had always been rather puzzling in matters

of this sort. She took "rank" extremely seriously. It didn't matter whether a person were in any way agreeable, if he "belonged."

But as far as Angela was concerned, she envied Mildred and was glad for her. For Mildred at least had found love. In such a case the "hotel clerk" prejudice was insignificant.

3

War was declared the day before Angela and her grandmother arrived in New York. The news was received while they were en route, to the wild excitement and enthusiasm of the people in the train. All passengers immediately assumed the intimacy of long years' friendship, and they alternated between outbursts of *The Battle Hymn of the Republic* and heated patriotic orations by a Methodist minister who happened to be aboard.

By way of contrast the old Day mansion seemed, when they reached home, more tranquilly placid and more antediluvian than ever before. Its broad windows gazed out at Park Avenue with a quiet, gentle regard; its lavender-scented interior was pleasantly encompassing, like a sweet-smelling hedge. Difficult to believe, standing in that flowered hallway with the phlegmatic portrait of Uncle Jeremiah staring down from above the red-brick fireplace, that there ever had been or ever would be such a thing as war.

Angela spent her first week trying to procure

some servants. She found domestic help of all kinds extremely scarce, but she finally succeeded in luring a young Norwegian girl to the house with promises of a shower attachment in the maids' bathroom. The maid, however, only stayed three days. After that, George Warbridge again unconsciously settled things.

He came to call one night; she knew it was he because he rang his short three rings—the signal that he had used as a child. And besides, it was one minute of eight. George made a fad of his infallible promptness.

She went to the door and swung it back on its heavy hinges.

"George!"—she stretched out her hand delightedly. "I'm so glad. However did you know I was home?"

"I didn't. I was passing by last night and saw the lights—you didn't let me know, so I took a chance."

"I've been so busy. Come in."

She led him into the green and gray drawing-room and switched on the electric light, the only modern appurtenance in the room. He had taken her unawares and she was in a delft blue house dress that she had never particularly liked, but it didn't matter. That was a nice thing about George; she didn't care how she looked or what she did, with him—he wouldn't mind.

But George—he was his usual dapper self. His

cutaway hugged his short stocky figure in a felicitous embrace; his fawn-colored spats topped boots that were as black and shiny as his bead-like eyes.

It seemed quite natural to see him seat himself in the winged armchair by the table and glance about while he waited for her to open the conversation. Even as a small boy, he had never been talkative, and it was Angela who had invented their games together.

"Well, George—tell me all about everything and everybody. I haven't had time to see people yet."

"There isn't much to tell." His ruddy face was serious. "Of course the war has changed things a lot."

"So soon? I didn't suppose—why ——"

"Oh, I don't mean that anyone has done anything very much so far," George admitted. He went on, for him, somewhat garrulously: "But everyone is planning. Take Marian Ellis and Jack Ten Broek. They're going to be married most any time now, because he's going into the navy in a few weeks, they say. I expect to be sent South myself nearly any day."

"George—you've enlisted?"

"I guess so. There's so much red tape it's hard to make out just what I have done. All I know is that as soon as they found out I'd been to a military school when I was a kid, they decided to send me down to Virginia as a second lieut. So I'm off in a couple of days."

The news struck like a thunderbolt. Angela had thought vaguely, had taken it as a matter of course that all her friends would enlist. But that, in her mind, had meant that they would be sent to a camp near at hand, where she could run out to see them occasionally on special days, much as she had done when they were away at college. Then, at some remote date, they would finally be sent abroad.

"But—but they won't send you over soon, will they?" she faltered.

"I don't know. I hope so—as long as I'm more or less trained. I'm sick of waiting around."

Angela shook her head slowly and the brightness of her hair against her pale skin flamed in the soft lamplight. "You make me terribly ashamed, George. I've been delaying war work while I tried to get servants and start the house running again, and you've been ——"

She broke off and fell silent, while George sat stodgily by. He finally remarked comfortably: "You have a wonderful place here, for a hospital."

His irrelevance was so surprising that Angela started. "And you have such cheerful thoughts!" she laughed.

"Well, that's what Mrs. Drewberry is going to do with her house, you know. She's going to turn it into a hospital for wounded soldiers. And Mrs. Widderly is starting the Fifth Avenue War Relief League. . . ."

Piece by piece she gathered the facts. All the

men she knew had enlisted or were arranging their affairs preparatory to going into the service. The women, those of whom were not giving their husbands and sons, were offering their homes, their time, their resources. Sacrifice, and the spirit that we were "out to win"!

It was nearing eleven when George finally rose to go.

"I may as well say good-bye," he announced in a matter-of-fact tone. "I don't know when I'll be sent away and I may not have a chance again."

Angela swung wide the door and held out her hand to him in her friendly way, careful to bid good-night in the same casual manner that she had always used with him.

"Well—good luck!"

"Thanks. And—and write to me—will you?"

"Of course."

Her frank eyes couldn't quite meet his, but she smiled valiantly, and as he ran down the steps she waved a blithe farewell, wondering meanwhile if she would ever see him just like that again. . . .

She went back, sadly, to the drawing-room, to switch off the light before going up to bed. And on the threshold, the serene loveliness of that quaint place smote her anew, as it always did whenever she entered. To her, it was the frame of everything that she saw and knew of life.

"You have a wonderful place here, for a hospital."

That quiet room filled with white beds . . . surely, no one could suffer here. Those gray walls, for tired eyes; the peaceful ticking of the tall clock for ears that were weary with the sound of bursting shells. . . .

Suddenly Angela turned out the lamp and in the darkness groped her way to the door. "Dear place ——" she murmured. "We'll have to—have to ——"

Her hand found the baluster of the stairs and rested there lovingly for a moment. Then resolutely, she started up the steps.

It was the second parting from an old friend that she had had that night.

4

But in the home of F. Gordon Fahnstock a different sort of scene was enacted that day. Malcolm had run away from college and had enlisted.

Mrs. Fahnstock came in late in the afternoon from a tea, and found him in the sitting-room, reading a copy of *The Manual of Arms,* with his slim legs nonchalantly thrown over one arm of the chair.

"Oh, Malcolm, I've told you so often not to sit in things sidewise! Look, you'll break it!"

"Sorry." Malcolm rose, glanced down at his mother quizzically.

"Why do you look so funny? You ——?" In her distress over the chair she hadn't realized that Malcolm had no business in the room at all. It

dawned on her now. "Good heavens, darling! What have you done? Oh, dear! Have they expelled you at Williams, too? What will your father say?"

Malcolm shook his sleek, wetly brushed head. "Calm your fit, Mom. It isn't that this time. I haven't done anything I oughtn't to do, if that's what you're afraid of."

"Well, but Malcolm, why are you here? We send you away to college and you appear in New York for no reason at all. I don't understand, really I ——"

"Don't worry," Malcolm smiled firmly. "I'll tell Dad when he comes in. . . . How are you, anyway, Mom?"

Mal—the apple of her eye! She worshipped him with the deepest feeling that the shallow recesses of her soul permitted. He was so tall, and slim, and blond. She looked up at him adoringly.

"I don't wonder all the girls make fools of themselves over you, Mal. I should, if I were nineteen, and not related to you."

"Aw—Mother!" Malcolm turned away in disgust.

"Well, I should. And anyone who can dance like you ——"

"'When he dance he mak' dose shoulder go-ooo —so-ooo!'" Malcolm sang. "How do you like this one? I do it for the fellows up at college. They cry for it."

"Oh—how disgusting! I hope you never dance that way outside. Really, Mal! They arrested some people in the Café Bordeaux the other night. You must be careful!"

"That's all right. Purely for home and frat consumption. I——"

An angry cough came from the direction of the doorway. Malcolm and his mother turned. F. Gordon Fahnstock, purpler than usual, his heavy eyebrows drawn into a thick, straight line.

"Hello, Dad! Been waiting for you!"

Mr. Fahnstock stepped in. "What's the matter this time? First it's you and then it's Mildred, and then it's you again. Well, what is it?"

Malcolm hung his head. "I'm sorry, but it's—well—it's——" He glanced toward Mrs. Fahnstock. "Couldn't we go into another room? I'd like to tell you alone, Dad."

"Alone?" Mr. Fahnstock's voice was strident. "So bad you can't tell it before your mother, eh? Very well, young man. . . . Step into my study and we'll have it out once and for all."

He swung abruptly about and thumped out of the room, and across the hall, where he stood with one hand on the knob of the door, waiting.

"Oh, Mal—what have you done? What dreadful thing——?"

Malcolm put his firm hands on his mother's plump shoulders. "Don't cry—for the love of Mike

—Mom! It's all right. I haven't done anything I oughtn't!"

Turning, he went to join his father, his blond head carried high. The door closed behind them, cutting off the drama from Mrs. Fahnstock's tearful eyes.

The father opened a humidor on the table of his study, and selected a long Russian cigar. Malcolm reached out eager fingers toward the cigarettes, but Mr. Fahnstock pushed him back.

"No, you don't! You know I don't want you to smoke those things. Those are only for guests." He struck a light. "Come on, now. Don't make any bones of your confession. I know it's bad."

His father's gruff tone piqued Malcolm. His lean face reddened. "All right, sir. If you're in a hurry, I'll tell you in two words: I've enlisted."

The cigar dropped from Mr. Fahnstock's hands. He turned to Malcolm, the purple in his face suddenly faded. "You've——?" He sank heavily into a chair.

"I say, Dad! I'm sorry I was so fresh—telling you that way. You made me kind of mad, and I——" Malcolm was bending over his father, sincere concern in his boyish blue eyes.

Mr. Fahnstock looked up. "Is—that why—you left—college?" he faltered.

Malcolm nodded. "I've had the dickens of a time trying to keep the news from Mother. Wanted

you to know first. Thought she'd go off the hooks and bawl or something."

Mr. Fahnstock straightened, made an effort to regain his own composure. He picked up his fallen cigar and attempted to light it again, but it shook.

"Here you are, Dad." Malcolm cheerfully held out a light.

Mr. Fahnstock puffed; the light caught. As Malcolm withdrew his hand his father grasped it, and blew out the match. "Little . . . Mal. . . ."

Malcolm pulled away awkwardly. "There you are, sir!"

There was a long silence. The mind of the older man was filled with flashes of the past—times when Malcolm was a child and they had really known each other.

Do you remember how we fished in that brook in Vermont?—he wanted to ask the question, to go over all the good times that they had had together. But he knew that Malcolm didn't care for the past. That was an old man's game.

His cigar was calming his nerves. He looked up at his son, his big Mal, who was going to war. "Where will they send you?" he demanded. His tone was practical.

Malcolm shrugged. "I don't know. Plattsburg, I hope. Anyhow, I couldn't stay up in Massachusetts, studying Latin."

"What branch?"

"Infantry. Good chance of a commission, too. Not that it matters so much. I'll get in the fight just the same."

Visions of a small, blond little boy punching a bigger boy, giving him a justly famous "mouse" under one eye! The apparition of a weeping mother and of an admonishing, but proud father! It all came back to Fahnstock.

"Tell me just one thing, Dad," Malcolm was saying. "Do you mind my having done what I have done? I'd—I'd kind of like to go off feeling you weren't—sore."

Sore? Mr. Fahnstock rose, gripped his son's arms in his tight hands. "I'd be darned if I'd see you do anything else!" he roared.

The proud old eyes looked into Malcolm's blue ones, and held. Something passed in that glance, something intangible, but as binding as steel.

"Oh, Lord!" Mr. Fahnstock cried presently. "We'd forgotten about Mother, Mal. We've got to tell her."

Malcolm laughed. "All right. Now for the fireworks!"

Together they went back to the sitting-room, as they had come away. Only this time their spirits were together, too.

5

The Days found a small apartment on Riverside Drive which suited their needs, and which rented

for possibly a tenth the amount that it had cost to keep up the old mansion.

Angela managed to do the housework before she went out in the mornings; she had plunged wholeheartedly into war work and was away from home most of the time. Not the war work that she would have preferred; she had tried desperately to obtain leave to go overseas to work with the refugee children, but she was too young. She had been forced to make the best of selling Thrift Stamps, War Savings Stamps, Liberty Bonds. And she waited on table in the canteens, knitted socks with furious haste,—and danced with the officers at the Vandermore.

This latter task, of course, she didn't consider in the light of "work." Marian Ellis, an old school acquaintance, now Marian Ten Broek, was a young bride who acted as one of the patronesses of the balls. She had invited Angela to come as a "regular" and Angela had promptly accepted. So many of the boys whom she knew had already become members of the Officers' Club.

It was at one of these parties that she met Malcolm Fahnstock for the first time since her return from California. She saw his blond head across the ballroom; he was dancing with an extremely rouged and earringed young "sub-deb" who had somehow managed to get herself invited to these affairs. Long and slim he was, with the proper air of boredom when he danced. And he could

dance!—Angela remembered him of old, even in the days of dancing-school.

He caught sight of her during the following number, and crossing the floor, cut in.

"Gosh all hemlock—if it isn't 'the Angel'!" he cried as he led her off. "Golly, I'm glad you're here. That little work of art in the shape of Rosalie Taylor is the only live wire I've been able to make a connection with so far, tonight."

"You mustn't flatter me, Mal. I'm liable to 'short-circuit,' you know."

Malcolm frowned in mock sternness. "Now don't start any of that Bernard Shaw repartee. Remember you're with me. Talk down to your audience. You know—that's the only thing I've got against you, Angela,—you're too blooming highbrow."

"You see," Angela replied lightly, "that's where I'm broader-minded. I've always liked you, even though I don't approve of you in the least. . . . But when did you join? I didn't know you had."

"Sure thing. Like a fool, I ran away from Williams. If I'd waited half a second I could have gone in with the whole darned college. Everybody enlisted right away, of course. Nothing like using your head—that's me! . . . Now—pay attention to your dancing. I'm going to try a tricky step in a minute. Now ——!"

"Aha!" Angela taunted a moment later. "You

didn't fool me on that one. Bring on all your tricks—I'm not afraid!"

But at that moment the dance came to an end with the usual "war-tax" finale, and a bugle announced the fact that it was the supper dance.

"Angel, must we eat?" Malcolm led her out into the hallway to a divan that was set in a grove of palm-trees. "Just when I had my appetite up for dancing. That's not nice."

Angela dropped onto the divan. "And I've been waiting all evening for that bugle. I thought they'd never blow it."

"Huh. Even the angels get hungry sometimes, don't they? Well, how do we get the 'mess'? Rustle around for it?"

"Yes." Angela nodded. "At these parties they deal things out from behind a buffet somewhere. Then the gentleman gets the lady her supper and brings it to her. And if he's really a gentleman he sees to it that her portion is of the proper dimensions."

"You're subtle, but I get you. All right—but remember, you've got to eat everything I bring you. That's part of it."

As he went off, Angela's eyes followed his slim, debonair figure half-humorously, half-wistfully. Malcolm Fahnstock had always seemed to her just to miss being what she would have designated as "a perfectly corking chap." He was attractive in his youthful physique and blondness; he was amus-

ing in his light, college-boy chatter; and he knew all the intricate twists of the game of flirtation, which he played cleverly and like a sportsman. To Angela, he was a nice boy, but shallow; he had been somewhat spoiled by his mother first, then by the girls of his own age. But he was like Milly; one couldn't help thinking him lovable.

When he returned she asked him about his sister. Where was she living? Why hadn't she written? How was she getting along?

"Oh, Milly's all right," he answered between mouthfuls. "She'll take care of herself in this world, nobody needs to worry about her. Gosh! If she was my wife I'd wring her neck. Course she's all right for a sister."

"I wish I could see her," Angela answered. "But I've been so busy with war work, and I know she must be, too. When did you see her last, Mal?"

"When I first came down from Plattsburg. Went up to show her my uniform."

"You look fine in uniform. Awfully—a—well, as if you were a high-up aide-de-camp—whatever that is!"

"I am." Malcolm's face lit like a child's at her praise, and the bored look, which he assumed, disappeared. "Didn't you realize, Angel, that I'm a First Lieutenant? The rest of this small-fry ——" he gave a mock gesture of contempt toward the ballroom. "Most of those fellows are only 'seconds.' I never was glad before that Dad had sent

me to military school with George Warbridge. But I'll hand it to the Old Man now."

"Poor George. . . . He's on the high seas now. . . ."

"Poor George—nothing! The kid's in luck!"

The orchestra in the distance had started again. A slow waltz, pathetic violins and a 'cello obligato.

Malcolm jumped up. "'If you could care for me, as I could care for you-hoo!'" he sang. "Come on, Angela, you've eaten enough for any human being—snap into it!"

He led her off and back to the ballroom, gliding smoothly, now walking, now turning, with a low, swinging dip. Three times they encircled the room before the number ended, and then as they stopped Angela looked up at him questioningly.

"Mal, tell me—is there anything wrong with me? My dress—it's very old, I don't buy any clothes because it's war, you know. But—is it all right? How do I look?"

"You look—just the way you always do. Did you ever see one of those porcelain figures that have their hair and clothes colored and their skins left white? That's how you look—like a porcelain doll. 'Fragile, do not handle'!"

"'Fragile' is good!" Angela laughed uneasily. "There never was anyone so disgustingly healthy. But—but I seem suddenly to have grown so unpopular—no one 'cut in' all during that dance. Is anything wrong, do you suppose?"

"No, everything's right, I think." Malcolm winked one mischievous blue eye. "Those things are sometimes—arranged," he suggested. "I happen to be the only First Lieutenant here. And, as you say—it's war!"

6

"Buy a bond, please! Won't you buy a bond?"

Angela's throat ached, her feet throbbed. Two more days for the Liberty Loan Drive; two more days in front of the Fifth Avenue Library, with the dizzying crowds. Begging, cajoling, pleading, and occasionally selling.

Anxiously she scanned the stage of the miniature theater on the steps. It made so much difference who spoke to the crowds. The psychology of the mob was an inexplicable thing; why people should become suddenly patriotic at the sight of their favorite moving picture star was mysterious, but actual.

But Angela wasn't looking for actors to-day; there was one man who could move the crowds in a way that no simpering ingénue and self-complaisant hero could hope to do, for all their nation-wide prestige. It was this man who was needed to-day; the closing of the drive, the last pennies to be squeezed from already flattened purses.

Miss Ray Cox, chairman of the Stage Women's War Relief, had stepped out to the edge of the platform to introduce the next speaker.

"We're very fortunate. We have again a man who knows conditions 'over there' as few of us know them. He can tell you what this money will do that you lend the Government. He *knows*. Mr. Irvin S. Cobb."

Angela breathed a sigh of relief at the name, and a burst of applause rose as Mr. Cobb came forward. It was all right; the bonds would go now, Angela was sure they would.

"Just a word about investments. . . .

"Then there are the poppy fields. . . .

"One thing. . . . Sacrifice . . . stop until there isn't anything left . . . got to do that much . . . *got* to. . . ."

While he spoke, Angela studied the faces in the crowd. Shop-girls, a delivery boy carrying a number of hat boxes, a good-looking young man with gray eyes. Her gaze fixed itself on the latter youth; she had learned enough of salesmanship in the past months to distinguish a prospective buyer from the casual listener. She saw the young man's expression change, during Cobb's talk, from a sort of passive attention to a more lively interest, then finally, to a genuine enthusiasm. As the speech closed, he applauded vigorously, his color heightened, a new light in his disquieted eyes.

She went up to him quickly. "Won't you buy a bond, please?"

He hesitated a moment, then snatched from her hands the slip that she had proffered him,

"Yes, I will—I'll take a—lot."

He fumblingly signed the card and passed it back to her.

"Buy a bond, please! Won't you buy a bond?" She had gone on to the next cluster of men and women, was begging, pleading with them.

And it wasn't until a half-hour later, during a lull between speeches, that Angela discovered who the handsome young man was who had bought her first bonds. Then, of course, he had disappeared.

On the slip that she had handed to him was the name of Milly's husband . . . Henry Tadd.

7

And after the first enthusiasm of war, the weary drag, the hopelessness, the agonizing grief, the endlessness. Only a little over a year and yet it was as if the United States had never known any other condition, as though peace were some fancy of the mind, some Utopia that could never actually be realized.

Angela tried to lose herself in work; Mrs. Day had found her place as general overseer of the hospital into which their mansion had been turned. They usually met at meals, but aside from those times, they saw little of one another during that nerve-straining period.

Toward the end of the summer of 1918, Angela received a letter from Malcolm Fahnstock. She had heard from him, since he had sailed, several

times. Formerly they had kept up a dilatory correspondence, during vacations.

It was ungrammatical, misspelled, typically the note of an American college-boy:

"You see I can't tell you where I am, but believe me, it's a whale of a place. They sent us back here for fourty-eight hours leave and they haven't even got a movie show in the town. The girls (?) in the Y. M. C. A. hut dance like—well, you've got to be heftier than I am to push some of those dreadnoughts around the floor.

"But you ought to see a lot of these French frogs fight. As much pep as if war had only just been declared. The other day a bunch of Frenchies who were holding the line south of us got pushed back, but the next day they went forward again at fearful odds. It seemed that they had been ordered to retreat, but they saw an opportunity and so they went to it to try to win back the ground they had lost. One of them said to me afterward, 'Il ny as que une vie et cest pour le France'—or something like that. Anyhow, that shows the spirit. . . ."

Yes, and it showed Malcolm's spirit, as well, showed Angela what she had been looking for in all of his letters—that perhaps there might be something beneath that frivolous attitude of his, that possibly it was a sort of flippant reserve that she hadn't understood. There was just a suggestion, but . . . this letter made Angela wonder.

CHAPTER III

1

Two more jaded months of war, and then, almost without warning, cessation. And after the Armistice came the lull. A sudden ceasing of frenzied industriousness, a return to practical everyday life, which seemed, by comparison, wonderfully peaceful but monotonous.

With only the easy housekeeping of that small apartment, Angela found existence too pleasant and idle a thing. She was restless. Mrs. Day watched her as she went about her trifling, unessential tasks. Angela spent hours polishing brass fixtures, waxing the floors, doing a hundred unnecessary things that succeeded only in keeping her hands occupied. And at last Mrs. Day spoke.

"I should think with all the talking that you've done about being a writer, that you'd get to work, Angela. Do you expect Calliope to touch you with the divine flame of inspiration? Is that what you're waiting for?"

Angela had been washing the white woodwork in her grandmother's bedroom while Mrs. Day sat by, with her usual fine embroidery. But at the sound of the deep voice she dropped her brush into the basin of soapy water and turned. "Why, no,

Nanna. I do want to write sometime—honestly. But I simply don't think I know enough yet."

"How do you think you're going to learn?" Mrs. Day challenged. "Just sit around and inhale knowledge? How does a painter learn to paint?"

Angela pushed back the wavy locks of reddish hair that fell over her forehead as a result of her recent exertions. "I don't know. I suppose he goes—maybe to Paris, if he has the money. And studies."

"Studies! There you are. Takes a course somewhere—learns what other people have done and the methods they use. Learns what it would have taken years of experience to find out for himself. Isn't that so?"

"Uh-huh." Angela picked up the brush again, recommenced her scrubbing vigorously.

But Mrs. Day hadn't finished. "There must be courses in writing that would teach its technique to the novice," she declared. "I've been thinking about it—wondering. Angela, why don't you look the thing up? I believe you have talent."

It was thus that Mrs. Day, herself, unknowingly played the part of Calliope. Her grandmother's suggestion sent Angela next day to the Public Library to investigate, by means of catalogues, every department of English in every university of standing in the country. And she found that she could live in New York City, in that same small apartment that they had leased for three years, since

Columbia offered a course that was precisely what she wanted.

She entered her class late that fall and presently she was caught up in the urge of her work and in the joy of it. The restlessness that had beset her since the Armistice was gone, or nearly. For, although she was undeniably happy in striving toward her one ambition, she still felt a certain lacking in her life, a certain promise that was, as yet, unfulfilled.

2

George Warbridge returned in January. Mrs. Day went to the door one afternoon and found him there, dapper as ever in his new civilian clothes.

"Good gracious, George! I thought you were the mail—home again, eh? My, but it's fine to see you!"

She drew him into the foyer and took his hat. She could remember so many times that she had unbuttoned his little overcoat for him when he and Angela had come in from play. And now he was coming home from war.

"Go in, do. Angela's out just now, but I expect her any minute. She'll be delighted. You must tell me all about yourself."

George followed her into the living-room. "Seems funny to find you people here."

Mrs. Day motioned him to a chair and picked up her embroidery. "The old place, you know—we

turned it over to the convalescent soldiers. I suppose they'll go on using it for a time, and then, we have our lease on this apartment."

She paused and looked up at him expectantly, lines of interest appearing between her fine aquiline nose and the humorous corners of her mouth. "George, you look so well. You weren't wounded?"

"Wounded?" George's bead-like eyes, ordinarily expressionless, snapped. "Fine chance I had of being wounded. Didn't get within fifty miles of the firing-line. Kept me back training the fellows."

He rose abruptly and crossed the room to a table in the corner. "That's awfully good. When did she have it taken?" He picked up a photograph of Angela and studied it, unaware that Mrs. Day had followed him with an amused gaze.

"A few months ago." Her tone was matter-of-fact. "She ——" Mrs. Day broke off at the sound of a key in the outer door. "There she is, now! I thought you wouldn't miss her."

George dropped the photograph hurriedly and faced about.

Angela was in the doorway. A winter wind had whipped her cheeks into a faint glow; the sage-green of her close hat brought out the robin's-breast tinge of her hair.

"George! How splendid!"

She ran to him, grasped his hand in a hearty grip. "I got your last letter, but I didn't expect

you as soon as this. How are you? What's the news? How's everything?"

"All right."

It was his same taciturn manner of shifting the conversational balance back to her, and Angela laughed. "Good old George!—Nanna, haven't you been able to make him talk?"

George shook his head. "I haven't anything to tell, honestly. I haven't done anything. Now, take Malcolm Fahnstock—he could tell you some stories. He's been in the thick of it."

"Oh? Is Malcolm home?"

Her question was a trifle too cool, a trifle too off-hand. Mrs. Day noticed the inflection, but George didn't.

"He got in a couple of days before I did."

Angela smiled, as though in casual interest. Inwardly she felt an injured pang. Not that she cared particularly, but it would have been polite of Malcolm to let her know he was home, especially since he hadn't replied to her last letter. She said lightly: "I just had an invitation from Marian Ten Broek for a week-end party. It's the first affair since the Armistice for me. Going, George?"

"I don't know the Ten Brocks well enough. Wish I did. Malcolm's going. I tell you ——" George glanced about the room, became suddenly verbose. "It seems good to be in a home again. I had just enough of a taste of war to appreciate ——"

But now that he was talking at last, Angela didn't listen. Malcolm was going to the Ten Broeks. . . . She was trying to decide whether she was disappointed or pleased.

"George, you must stay to dinner." It was Mrs. Day's voice, boomingly cordial.

And with a start, Angela came back to the present, and George.

3

"Aw go on, Angela, don't be a piker!"

Angela shook her head and tried to smile up at Jack Ten Broek who stood swinging a goblet toward her. "I hate to refuse my host anything. But—but I don't like the stuff, you know."

Jack turned back to the group of girls and men who had flung themselves on and about the hearth.

"I ask you," he blustered in mock temper. "Is this a nice lady to have as your guest? Won't do what you want her to do? Won't drink what you want her to? All ri' ——" with a gesture of submission he raised the glass to his lips. "Gotta drink it myself. All there is to do."

The crowd laughed and one of the girls called out shrilly: "That's the line, Jackie! Show us how you do it!" and giggled sharply, squealingly.

Saturday evening, and she must stay until Monday morning. Angela sighed.

She hadn't known the Ten Broeks thoroughly enough, she realized that fact too late. Marian

Ellis had been a Shelborough girl but aside from that, Angela hadn't known much about her.

A very young, very newly-married couple, unused to the liberties that their present estate afforded them; the reaction of the war, the desire for fun so intensely sought that the result wasn't worth the trouble. . . . Angela found herself in a rather uncomfortable position.

But more than that, she was bored. Bored by the constant feverish activity, for the sake of doing something. Skating, tobogganing, dancing, bridge, poker, billiards. Any one sport she would have enjoyed, but they must do everything, they must keep going. And then, the bombardment of "smart-talk," which, when it was analyzed, wasn't particularly smart.

Her own generation Angela had been in the habit of dividing into two classes: the "petters" and the people who could enjoy life without that especial form of sport. Her friends, naturally, had been of the latter group for the most part, but this time she had fallen in with a crowd of Fitzgeraldites. It was awfully amusing; in one way Angela wouldn't have missed it. But she had had enough; it was tiresome.

Friday night a dance at the country club, followed by a supper which consisted mostly of beverages; then, in the morning, skating and hiking, cocktails, luncheon, coasting, pool, cocktails, bridge, cocktails, dinner. And now—cocktails.

"What'll we do to-night, huh?" Jack was raucously demanding. "Must have a party. What'll it be?"

Angela groaned inwardly and catching Malcolm Fahnstock's eye across the room, turned away. She had avoided Malcolm as much as possible, so far, and he had made no attempt to force his companionship upon her, although, she thought, he might have offered some excuse for not answering her letter.

"S'pose we go up to the Inn? Motor up, have a little supper, have a little dance. What-ho?"

The suggestion was greeted with wild acclaim. The girls ran up-stairs for their cloaks, while most of the men went out to the garage to get the cars. Angela hung behind, uncertain whether to plead fatigue, or whether it would be easier to go.

"I say—Angela! See here a minute!"

She swung about and saw that Malcolm was standing at the foot of the stairs.

"Yes?"

Her tone was cool, but he appeared not to notice that. "You want to get out of this party, don't you?" he whispered.

"Yes!" She forgot her pose of dignity in her eagerness.

"Then take your time—get your cloak—slowly. Be sure you're the last girl down. I'll fix it. Will you?"

"Yes."

She ran up the stairs, went to her room, and waited in the dark until she heard the other girls noisily descend.

"Where's Angela?" Jack's voice floated up from outside.

"Coming, I guess. I'll wait for her." It was Malcolm. "I'll drive her out in the roadster."

"All right. See you later!"

And as the sound of the engines grew faint, Angela at last went down.

"Come on, get in."

Malcolm helped her into the car, then crawled behind the wheel.

"We'll start off for the Inn," he swung the motor out into the road, "but we ain't never goin' to git there, Angel."

"What are you going to do?"

Malcolm laughed. "Aha! Secret stuff. . . . Gosh! What a party!"

She turned to him quizzically. "I didn't suppose you'd be shocked."

"Shocked?—Oh, you mean the drinks and all? No, I'm not shocked. But I'm getting too old—or—or maybe it's the war. The gay life isn't for me—I'm a poor working man—I can't stand it. Anyhow, this doesn't strike me as gay enough for all the fuss."

"Where are you working? I didn't know. . . ."

"Didn't know? I wrote you I was going in with Dad, and he ——"

"You wrote me? Then you did answer my letter?"

"Of course. Say—is that why I didn't hear? And why I've been getting the well-known stony stare for the last twenty-four hours? Doggone! Didn't you get my letter?"

"No. But it's all right, as long as you did write. What I want to know now is—what are we doing, and—why?"

Malcolm pointed ahead. "See that town we're coming to? Before we get there, I hope—we're going to have an accident."

Angela started. "What do you mean?"

"When it comes to getting out of doing things that I don't just want to do—I'm there, Angel, I'm there!"

"You're too mysterious."

She leaned back, gazed out over the dark fields and up into the black, moonless sky. And presently he spoke again—anxiously.

"This blooming car is so good—I begin to wonder if ——"

But even as he spoke the engine quivered irregularly.

"That's the baby!" Malcolm cried.

They ran on a hundred feet, badly missing fire. Then, abruptly, the engine sighed and breathed its last.

"Malcolm—why!" Angela's startled voice rang out alarmed.

"Why?" His own tone was ridiculously calm. "You don't want to go to the Inn, do you? Neither do I—and now we can't. I fixed the engine before we started. Haven't hurt the car much, and I'll pay for the damage."

"But—but how shall we get back?"

"I thought of that, too ——" he glanced at his wrist-watch. "Train comes through this town at eleven-thirty. It's the last train either way and it goes direct to New York. . . . Come, let's find a garage!" . . .

Early in the morning he left her at her door.

"You're a good sport, Angel. I'll say that for you. I was afraid you'd be awfully peeved."

"Peeved ——? Why?"

"Oh—my kidnapping you that way. But golly, I thought I'd take a chance. It made me just kind of sick to see you in with that bunch. Do you forgive me?"

"Forgive you?" she laughed. "I'm—I'm grateful to you."

"And—and now I'm home and you know I wrote you and everything—you'll let me see you once in a while?"

Angela's frank eyes smiled up at him. "Of course. . . . Good-night!"

In her own room she undressed quietly, careful not to disturb Mrs. Day. And when, finally, she opened her window, she stood there gazing out at the river that was like a broad stream of

ink, and across at the black shadow of the Palisades.

Malcolm had proven himself . . . there was something beneath that flippantly attractive surface, and she had found it.

CHAPTER IV

1

ANGELA found herself presently in a perplexing position. She saw a great deal of Malcolm, but his attitude bothered her. He had always had the reputation of being rather a flirt, but with her he seemed to carry things to an extreme.

She didn't know quite why, but somehow she disliked having him try to flirt with her. She wanted him to take her, as a friend, more seriously, not to consider her in the class with any girl whom he might have met at a dance. Hadn't they known one another all their lives? That, surely, put their friendship in a different light.

Then, too, she discovered that he interfered materially with her work. She was still struggling with her short stories and had received a number of encouraging letters from magazine editors, which had all the more strengthened her purpose to write. But she found, after an evening with Malcolm, that it was difficult to concentrate on the abstract, there was so much of interest to her in the tangible, in the concrete. It was against her better judgment that she continued to go out with him so frequently, but she stifled her conscience with the thought of "getting material."

He took her to the Vandermore tea-room to dance

one Saturday, after the matinée. That seemed to be the accepted place for their parties to "wind up," perhaps because it reminded them both of that war-dance of the Officers' Club.

"What is it—the usual?"

Angela nodded, and threw back her fur coat on the chair. "Yes. Café Parfait—you know—not tea."

Malcolm gave the order and rising, they went out to the dancing floor. He led her off and Angela fell easily into his swinging stride. A certainty about his leading, and yet no exasperating shoving. They seldom talked when they danced now; there was too ecstatic a joy in the sureness of what they were doing, in that perfect harmony of movement.

Back at their table, Malcolm lit a cigarette. "Did you see my mother out in the hallway while we were dancing?" he demanded. "She took you in, all right. Guess she was glad it was you."

"Why so?"

"Oh, you're the kind of a girl that a mother likes her son to go with, you know. Joke of it is, the sons like it too. Especially this one."

"But isn't—this son rather easily pleased? I've been told that he has been in the past."

"Aha! But the past is—the past. Little Malcolm learned a thing or two during this last year, and not everything was military tactics. He got a sense of—well,—values. Or shall we say a sense of—discrimination ——?"

Angela's pale face flushed and she glanced away. . . . He was trying to flirt again . . . she wished he wouldn't. It didn't please her; it—it almost pained her. But when she met his gaze again, he was laughing.

"Your pink cheeks go with your rose dress," he said mischievously. Then, blowing a puff of smoke off into space, he remarked quite seriously: "I like you in rose, Angel. You ought to wear more of it. Why don't you?"

"Rose isn't supposed to go with red hair," Angela answered firmly.

"But it does. On you—it looks—great!"

If any man says you're pretty, you'll know either that he's a flirt, or else he's in love with you.

Mrs. Day's warning came back to Angela with sudden force, as it had so many times of late. She faced Malcolm, her frank eyes pleading.

"Mal—do we have to play this silly game? Can't we be just—sensible—and friendly?"

He frowned, puzzled. "Come again?"

"I mean ——" she faltered. "Oh, it's awfully hard to explain, but—I wish you wouldn't say the things that you do say to me. I'm not—good-looking. Why do you always pretend that you think so? It—it hurts me, Mal."

Malcolm shrugged. "Honestly, Angela, I don't know what you're raving about. I said—what I thought. I never said you were pretty. I don't think you are. You're so much more wonderful

than just—'pretty.'" He bent over the table toward her and his lean face was boyishly earnest. "Angela—I think you're—beautiful."

Angela drew away, wide-eyed, breathing fast. But he continued swiftly in a more practical tone:

"Don't misunderstand me. I'm not giving you the opportunity to throw me down. I know I wouldn't stand a chance with you. I want things to be just as they are—as long as they can be. Until some other chap luckier than I am appears on the scene. Come on, now—let's dance!"

He rose and waited for her to precede him to the open floor-space. But she remained seated. "I don't think I want to dance, Mal," she said simply. "Perhaps I do misunderstand—but I think I'd rather stay right here and have you give me that opportunity to—throw you down. . . ."

He took an eager step toward her, then pulled her almost roughly by the arm. "Stay here? This is a fine place for a—proposal! Oh, Angela! Let's get out of here—will you? Gosh! I never supposed ——!"

2

"Well, what's to become of your work?" Mrs. Day demanded.

She had taken the engagement at the first with no great enthusiasm. She told Angela frankly that she preferred George Warbridge. But Mal-

colm, at the last, had completely won her heart. George had always treated her with a venerating respect, but Malcolm had insisted upon her accompanying himself and Angela to the theater; he had even taken her to a cabaret. And since she had had nothing definitely against him at the start, this subtle attitude of his that she was still in the prime of youth undoubtedly had its effect. Now her only objection was that Angela seemed to have given up all thought of writing.

"You haven't any laurels to rest upon, yet, Angela. Are you going to give up your job before you've made good?"

But Angela waved aside her career with a sweeping gesture of her straight-fingered hand. "Writing is fun because—because you can build characters and watch them grow. But they're only make-believe. And now, maybe some day, when Mal and I are married"—her frank eyes were soft,—"maybe there'll be real little characters to help build and to watch grow. Nanna—isn't that more worth while?" . . .

She had thought so much, in those months since she had accepted Mal, of children, and of their children. The idea that perhaps so soon she might be a mother, was frightening. She wondered if she were prepared, whether she were quite worthy to accept that accolade. She bought books on child-training, and studied them. It didn't occur to her that she was premature, any more than if she had

been studying, preparatory to entering college. She simply knew that she wanted a child of her own more than anything—she had known that in her heart ever since the afternoon in Santa Barbara when she had worked so desperately over the lifeless small form of Margerie Joyce. And she felt that a marriage, even with a love like hers and Malcolm's, would be a forlorn and pitiable thing if it weren't for the hope of such completion. . . .

During their engagement, they found that in many small ways their tastes were different. But Malcolm had solved that difficulty in a typically practical way.

"I'll tell you what we'll do," he declared. "We'll have this thing fifty-fifty. You go to vaudeville with me, and I'll go to opera with you. How's that?"

So Angela had gone to see Chic Sale and had laughed until she cried, and she had taken Malcolm to Aïda which he pronounced "pretty good stuff."

The affiance was to have been announced the following December, but Malcolm was suddenly called south on business. He broke the news to Angela while they were taking their usual Sunday afternoon walk in Central Park.

"I'm awfully sorry, Angel," he finished earnestly. "But you see how it is. Dad has given me this chance and I've got to take it. Don't you think so?"

"I suppose. But—but doesn't your father know about—us?"

He shook his blond head. "I tried to hint to him, sort of. But if I'd told him, I'd have had to tell Mother and then there would have been a fuss."

"A fuss?"

"Yes. Oh, you don't know Mother! She likes you a lot, but when it comes to you or any other girl marrying her first-born—the sparks are going to fly, that's all. I thought I'd better let the thing slide until we announced it."

Angela laughed. "Wise boy! Well, as long as you have to go south ——" she drew her coat about her and shivered. "You've chosen the best time of year!"

Malcolm glanced about at the park with its barren trees and bleak brown lawns. "It will seem good to see things green," he admitted. He turned to her with abrupt eagerness. "But I don't want to go. I want to stay where you are, Angel."

"Where is it that you're going?" Angela queried practically.

"Georgia. Down where my mother's people come from. I've never been there before. Suppose I'll be out doing business for Dad all day and chinning with my long-lost relatives all evening. But then, there'll be your letters!"

They were nearing that circular artificial lake on which the small boys of the east side of the city sail their toy boats.

"Look!" Angela cried. "Isn't he darling, Mal? Look at that little fellow!"

With all the serious effort of his four years a child in red sweater and cap was sitting on the edge of the pool, adjusting the sail on his boat.

"Pretty big job you've got there, isn't it, kid?" Malcolm bent over the child, watched his fat fingers struggling with the sail.

"Thith ith wrong here," the boy replied, pointing to a loose screw. "You fixth it."

"I don't know whether I can," Malcolm laughed. "Here, maybe this will do it." He pulled out his penknife and tightened the screw. "Try that now."

The child took the boat soberly, laid it on the water's surface. The sail stood upright, then, with a sudden gust of wind, the tiny craft shot out swiftly toward the middle of the pool.

"Ray—hoooraaaay!" the child howled, and he danced off gleefully, anxious to reach the other side of the lake, to meet his boat.

Angela and Malcolm turned to one another and smiled.

"And five years from now ——" Malcolm began. "Say, Angel—I'm awfully glad that you like them, too. . . ."

That evening, Angela told her grandmother of their afternoon.

"We talked it all over," she concluded, "and we're going to consult each other always, when they need to be punished, or when they want something

they shouldn't have. Then, when we decide, there won't be any difficulty about enforcing our commands—as long as we stand together. Don't you think that's a good plan?"

Mrs. Day had been sitting with her embroidery in her lap, during her granddaughter's recitation. Her fine old eyes were startled, her humorous mouth drawn tight.

"Angela Day! You don't mean that you and Malcolm were actually talking about those things?"

Angela's gaze was frank. "Why not? Is there any reason why I shouldn't talk about my children to—the man I love?"

Mrs. Day sighed. "O, tempora, O, mores! In my generation——" she broke off. Then she scowled, and picked up her needlework. "No, Angela. I'm sure I don't know why you shouldn't." And her deep, stern voice was challenging.

3

Malcolm telephoned the next day.

"I've got to leave on the two-thirty, and I'll stop for you in a taxi. You're supposed to come and see me off, you know."

Angela slipped into a coat and tucked her terra-cotta locks under a blue feather toque. She stood by the living-room window watching for Malcolm; presently his taxi pulled up before the door. She ran down and he helped her in.

"I'm going with you, and then I'm going up to Mme. Darquenne's to see if my hat is ready. It's rose-colored. You'll like it."

"That's good." He took one of her hands. "Gloves? Why do you wear the rotten things? That's better."

"Mal—I wish you weren't going away." She laughed half-heartedly. "It's silly, but I'm nervous."

"You're afraid I'll fall for one of those Georgia peaches, huh?"

She squeezed his hand. "No. But it's the first time we've been separated."

"I know, Angel. Hang it! I wish I didn't have to go!"

They rode in silence for a time. Then, almost before they realized, they were in the Pennsylvania Station.

Angela raised her face to his, at the gate to the train. "Kiss me just as if I were your wife, dear. Nobody'll know the difference—they don't know us."

But the kiss that Malcolm gave her was not of the commonplace, husbandly sort. . . . Angela blushingly fled from the station.

There was a bright, cheerful sun that December day, and crossing Thirty-fourth Street, her spirits rose. Now that Malcolm was actually gone she felt herself again, the same self that she had been since Malcolm and she had found each other. There was

a bloom on everything, these days; Angela saw visions and she dreamed dreams. There was no sense of lacking now.

Passing up the Avenue, she turned into Mme. Darquenne's shop. She had just stepped inside when she caught sight of a familiar figure out of the corner of her eye. She swung about and ran back.

"Vee! Vee! Stop a minute!"

It was Vera Henny, as handsome and as perfectly poised as ever.

"Why, Angela! How are you? So nice to see you!"

"Why haven't I heard from you?" Angela demanded. "What's the news? Why haven't you written?"

Vera smiled coolly. "Haven't you read the news? It's been in all the papers. I'm engaged. Didn't you hear?"

So that wonderful thing had happened to Vera, too. Angela caught her breath.

"No—Vera, really? To whom? Do I know him?"

"Edward Storm." Vera shrugged. "Possibly you do—he's a member of the Iris Club."

"No, I don't. But—the Iris Club? Perhaps George Warbridge knows him then. I must ask him. . . . Vera, dear," Angela took one of Vera's cool hands and pressed it in her own, "I'm so glad you're happy. I—I'm happy, too. I——"

But a salesgirl interrupted. "Your hat is ready to try on, Miss Day. Mme. Darquenne is waiting."

"Oh, dear!" Angela exclaimed. "I wanted to talk to you and now—but can't I see you some other time?"

"I'm being married next month," Vera replied. "Will you come to my wedding? You've moved, haven't you?"

"Yes. Three thousand, Riverside Drive. Do send me an invitation!"

Angela dashed off, following the salesgirl.

And as she tried the new rose hat on her head, she saw her flushed and radiant face in the glass.

Oh, mercy. . . . Why couldn't she be calm and collected, like Vera? Joy stuck out all over her like pin-feathers. . . . It was absurd.

4

But no letters came from Malcolm. At first Angela decided that business had been so strenuous that he hadn't had time. Then panic struck her.

"I don't understand, Nanna. It isn't like him. It can't be that—some other girl—that he ——"

"I shouldn't worry," Mrs. Day affirmed emphatically. "If he's that sort, he isn't worth your while. But"—she shook her head—"I don't believe he is. You wait and see. It'll be explained."

And Angela waited. Waited until by the schedule he had given her, she knew that he must have returned to New York. Waited one week more,

then swallowed her pride in her anxiety and telephoned his home.

His voice, when he answered, was strained:

"Yes, I'm home again. . . . I want to see you. . . . May I—may I come over now?"

She spent a frightened, fretful half-hour before he appeared. And his face, when he finally came, sent a chilled alarm to her heart. Something was terribly wrong . . . perhaps—perhaps he had found that he didn't love her, after all. . . .

"Mal—what is it? Tell me right away!"

He took her hand and pressed it silently, without offering to kiss her. He was paler than she had ever seen him, and there was a stoop to his slim, square shoulders. Together they went into the living-room and he flung himself on the wide divan.

"I'm a rotten slacker," he moaned. "I didn't have the courage to come before."

She dropped down beside him. "Courage? But why, Mal?"

"It's—it's—horrible." His blue eyes turned to her piteously. "I—I don't know how to tell you."

She stiffened. "I think I understand. You mean—you don't—care for me—any more?"

"Care? I care more than ever. It's because I care so much that ——" He took out his cigarette case and then he forgot to open it. Instead, he jumped up nervously and crossed the room. "Oh, what's the use?" He swung about. "I might as

well tell you—I've got to. Angel—I—I can't—marry you."

The words fell meaninglessly.

"But if you love me, Mal?"

She couldn't understand; it was as if he had lost all reasonable thought. She caught his hand and gently pulled him down beside her again, and she spoke as she would have soothed a disturbed child, quietly, encouragingly:

"Now, tell me from the beginning. Tell me."

"Well—it was down in Georgia. Lord, I wish I'd never gone there! I—I found out something about my mother's family that nobody knows—not Mother—not Milly—nobody."

"Yes?" Angela's gentle tone was questioning.

"This old great-uncle of mine—I never saw him before, but he knows all about us. Angel, he says—he says ——"

"What, dear?"

"That—that in our family there's a sort of a—a curse. It may break out any time. He says that my great-grandparents were deaf and dumb—he remembers them. And every two or three generations that comes out. Don't you see? . . . Oh, what are we going to do? What—am I—going to do?"

Her hand trembled in his. "But, Mal—there's your mother and you—and Milly—and Milly's baby!"

"Oh, I know. It's all right, so far—thank God!

But—but there's no knowing. And I can't—I can't let you. . . ." He drew his hand away and put it over his eyes. "I wouldn't feel so strongly—but there was another family down there—and they had children—little, pitiful things that couldn't speak or hear, and just looked at you and—oh, I can't let you! I mustn't!"

They sat there silently, for a moment, and at last Angela's voice came. "Then, I guess for us it's—the end."

His blond head was bent forward and, leaning toward him, she smoothed his yellow hair with quiet, motherly fingers.

"Oh, Angel, if I'd only known before!" he groaned. "If I could have spared you! But"—his blue eyes sought hers with tragic earnestness, "but I want you to find someone else—someone who'll love you and take care of you. I want you to have those blessed children of yours!"

Angela gave a sad little smile. "But it isn't the children I want now, Mal. It's—you!"

He took her in his arms and kissed her pale cheeks, her drawn, tight-lipped mouth. She wasn't weeping; she had never been the crying kind. She only knew that the candle of their hopes had been snuffed out; the altar of their love was dark and desolate.

Abruptly he pushed her away. "This isn't right. It's only making it harder for us." He rose. "In the romantic days people used to pine away from

things like this. But it isn't done now." He tried to laugh. "No, Angel—you and I—we've got to —snap out of it!"

He bent over and once more taking her hand, he laid his lean cheek against it. "I mustn't see you again. It wouldn't be playing fair," he said simply. "But I love you, Angel. And I'll always be loving you. . . . Good-bye. . . ."

She sat there, dazed, looking at the hand that he had held, trying to realize that he had gone, and that she couldn't call him back. Then she rose, squared her shoulders, drew her lips into a fine, firm line. Not for her to be the drooping damozel.

"He's right," she murmured. "I've got to— 'snap out of it'!"

CHAPTER V

1

THE nights were the hardest times. There was always the dream that, by some dreadful mistake, she and Malcolm had married, and then there were the children—the children who couldn't speak, who couldn't hear her voice—they stretched out their beseeching arms to her; their pitiful presence haunted her.

And even in the daytime there were ordeals. Vera's wedding came almost immediately after the breaking of her own romance. The ceremony was exceptionally simple; evidently it was quite a compliment to have been asked. But the sight of her schoolmate's joy opened up the channels of Angela's regrets; she wouldn't have attended the wedding if she hadn't given Vera her promise.

It was in her work that Angela found a refuge. She had begun a novel; she pretended an enthusiasm that she didn't in the least feel. Her final reward was a genuine interest that took her mind away from her lonely thoughts and made her less unhappily introspective.

Mrs. Day watched her with an eagle eye, encouraged her in her writing, and once the story of the severed engagement was told, made no further ref-

erence to it. She did, however, advise Angela in regard to George Warbridge.

"George is a nice boy, and he thinks a great deal of you, Angela. I hope you won't hurt him any more than you can help."

"Hurt him?" Angela was startled. "Why, Nanna, why should I? I think a great deal of him, too."

"I know—but it's different."

Angela thought a moment in silence, then patted her grandmother's shoulder affectionately. "Dear old Nanna. You're so sentimental, aren't you? But get that out of your head—please!" she laughed. "There isn't a thing in it."

In spite of her light words, Mrs. Day's suggestion left Angela wondering. Oddly enough, it hadn't occurred to her before that George might be offering himself to her as anything else beside a very good and very pleasant friend. And as she considered that other possibility now, she didn't for a moment believe it was true. Still, it was a possibility and as such, it vaguely worried her.

"If you could have seen the way he looked at your picture!"—Mrs. Day didn't let her first insinuation stop at that; she made the reasons for her beliefs perfectly definite until Angela, though not completely convinced of the fact, nevertheless decided to be on the side of the cautious.

She made her work her excuse when George asked to call thereafter. For she couldn't, couldn't

risk making him suffer what she had so recently been forced to face. She cared too much for George to take that chance.

His voice over the telephone at first was disappointed, then there was a hurt quality that made her wince. Finally he stopped calling her up. He understood.

She saw no more of him that year until spring when she ran into him on Madison Avenue one afternoon. He gave her a polite but formal bow as he passed, and she noticed that he seemed more pompous. People told her, later, that he was drinking heavily.

2

There was an event that year which was of particular comfort to Angela. Miss O'Brien, the actress whom she had known in Santa Barbara, came to see her one day without warning.

"Why—but I thought you ——" Angela's eyes widened with amazement as she drew the girl into the apartment. "I never heard from you, and so ——"

Miss O'Brien laughed. In the brighter light of the living-room, her new plumpness was more noticeable. "Sure, I knew you'd think I was dead. Well, I was pretty nearly, the first year. Your letters were all forwarded to me from Santa Barbara. But I was afraid to answer them for fear you'd send me more money."

They sat down together on the divan, Miss O'Brien's keen glance sweeping Angela's figure. "Say, you're not so well yourself, are you now?"

"Oh, yes," Angela answered swiftly. "I'm quite all right, I——"

"Had trouble, haven't you?"

Angela started. "Y-y-yes. How did you know?"

"I guess I've had so much myself, I kind of know the marks." She stretched out her hand in her boyish way. "I'm sorry."

Angela gave it a friendly pat. "Thanks. . . . People like you—help a lot." She forced a smile. "But tell me about Colorado," she said briskly. "Have you been there all the time? My! You're so changed. It's splendid!"

Miss O'Brien nodded eagerly. "I'm fine now. Just fine. I couldn't do much of anything at first. Then I got a little better. Later, I was able to take a job in the hospital in Denver—filing. I saved up enough money out of my salary to come on to New York for my vacation. And here I am."

"I'm so glad you came to me. I've thought of you these last three years."

"Maybe you have. But I've thought of you night and day—honest." The girl nodded in emphasis. She went on wistfully: "I don't know what it is that's a sorrow to you. I don't want you to tell me if you don't care to. But just let me say this much: If it hadn't been for you, I'd have wasted away out

there in Santa Barbara and nobody would have bothered. And if it hadn't been for the thought of you, I'd have died of loneliness that first year in Colorado. Remember that, and maybe sometime the thought'll be a comfort."

Angela's pale face lighted. "Oh, I'd like to think that I had helped you—after the way I hurt you . . . and that you forgave me?"

Miss O'Brien laughed harshly to conceal the break in her voice. "Of course I forgave you. Didn't you say we were—friends?"

3

Six months it took Angela to finish her novel. And when she finally typed the last page, she burst into her grandmother's room and threw herself wearily on the bed.

"It's—it's simply a disgrace!" she moaned. "It's—it's the best that's in me, and see how—how perfectly awful it is!"

Mrs. Day crossed the room with an emphatic tread and seated herself beside Angela's prostrate figure. "It's good work. I guess I know it as well as anybody."

"You're prejudiced, Nanna. I've been wasting my time. I'll never send it out."

"Not send it out!" Mrs. Day bent swiftly forward and snatched the typewritten sheets from Angela's hand. "Very well—then I shall! I'll be

your business agent, if you haven't spine enough to do it for yourself."

And Mrs. Day kept her word. At the first publisher's rejection she gave Angela a vehement and mordant oration on editorial unintelligence. Then, undaunted, she sent the manuscript elsewhere.

But the periods between the publishers' decisions were most trying, especially for the older woman. Angela had small hope of selling the novel; the more she reread it, the more convinced she was of its literary worthlessness. Mrs. Day, on the other hand, was certain of its eventual success. That was why, she told Angela, the delay in its acceptance seemed the harder to endure.

"I declare, this time, if the Andrews Company don't take it, I'll wash my hands of all publishers! But don't lose hope. You'll see!"

Finally, almost as Mrs. Day herself gave up all ambitions for the novel, it was unexpectedly accepted.

"We like very much your work in 'The Upper Ten.' Will you come to our office as soon as possible and talk the matter over?"

Angela's wide-set eyes were dazed; she turned to her grandmother for an explanation.

"I told you! What did I say?" Mrs. Day was hoarse with excitement. "Now you can write for the rest of your life. Your future is settled!"

And Angela nodded silently as the light broke upon her, then.

After all, she wouldn't be one of life's slackers, living in that might-have-been world. Things ahead, perhaps, weren't glowing as they had been when . . . But at least, she had found a future.

4

"Miss Day's first effort is called by the publishers 'a satire on society.' We think it very like Miss Daisy Ashford's work. . . ."

"Crude, callow, and ingénue. Probably will be read by the lovers of *Little Women*. . . ."

"Reminds us of the much-used vaudeville phrase, 'snappy, but clean'—except that it lacks the snap. . . ."

"Why on earth 'The Upper Ten'? The name doesn't mean anything, the book not much more. In this sudden passion of the publishers for the work of young writers, pity the poor critics! We are literally and literarily cracking under the strain. . . ."

Angela read all criticisms eagerly. The fact that her book had been accepted, that its sale up to date was exceptional, didn't prove that she was a good writer, and she knew it. She was buoyed up by the fact that she had happened to hit upon something that the public seemed to like; she was depressed because it hadn't been better received by the critics.

But whereas they objected so strenuously to her immaturity, it was this very youth upon which she based her hopes. She was young, thank heaven—young enough to learn to correct her mistakes!

The letters of congratulation came pouring in from every quarter. People whom she had met years before and had never seen since, wrote to her. But what delighted her particularly were the notes from other writers, because they knew, they appreciated the struggle that she had had, the struggle that she would always have.

She came in late one afternoon, after a brisk walk on the Avenue. She liked to pass the shops and see the volumes of her book banked in the windows. It gave her a childlike thrill.

As she opened the apartment door, she stooped to pick up the mail that had been left there. And she caught her breath as she saw the top envelope, battered, soiled, and torn. It was the letter that Malcolm had sent from overseas, at last delivered.

She went into her room and with trembling fingers, tore open the note and read it. It was flippant and it was misspelled and—she loved it. . . .

There was another envelope—from The Shelborough School. She slit it listlessly. The invitation to the five-yearly reunion and a few lines from Mrs. Shelborough, enclosed:

"I'm so glad you've succeeded. You've done just what you wanted to do more than anything else,

haven't you? You've written your novel, and you've found fame."

She laid the note aside and once more picked up Malcolm's dilapidated letter.

The reunion . . . well, she wouldn't let the others see that she wasn't happy. . . . To them, she'd show a jubilant front. Like Mrs. Shelborough, they would think that she had fulfilled her heart's desire, now that she was famous.

But—fame? Angela smoothed the torn paper in her hand with a simple, tragic tenderness. What did so little a thing as fame matter?

EPILOGUE

EPILOGUE

1

"And now you come to us with that deeper, fuller knowledge that Life has taught you—you return to us for one brief, flitting moment before taking wing again. . . ."

Dr. Shelborough's office reverberated with the sound of his own quivering voice. To-morrow a reunion, and another speech.

His wife, seated at the desk with her customary squeaky pen, glanced up uncertainly, her light eyebrows raised. "That's so good, Bert . . . but haven't you said something like that before?"

He greeted her meek question with a frown. He folded his wide hands and glared down at her with self-important indignation.

"My dear ——" his endearment was patronizing and it was not untouched by sarcasm. "My dear, there is nothing true and nothing beautiful that has not been said before. It is all—h'mmm—in the manner in which you say it."

She nodded submissively and went back to her work.

It was always the same: the same speeches, the same curriculum, the same problems. Those girls, to-morrow, would find things quite unchanged.

Presently Mrs. Shelborough paused in her writing, and looked up. Her husband was standing with his back toward her, his thick-fingered hands clasped behind him. He was gazing up at the rotogravure of the Acropolis, just as he had gone to it unfailingly for inspiration during all the thirty years that he had acted as principal and owner of the school. His gray toupee was as neat as ever; his schoolmaster manner as soothingly condescending.

And Mrs. Shelborough sighed. . . . Would those girls, those three whom she had loved—would they have fallen into a rut, too? Or would they be different, would they, as she hoped, be finer?

Mildred and Vera had married; Angela had written a book. They had said on that day, five years ago, that they would make their own futures, and she wondered. . . . Had they actually succeeded in that uneven match against fate—had they won?

"I'm sorry to interrupt your thoughts ——" Dr. Shelborough had swung about. "But those cards —they really must go out this afternoon."

She caught the irony of his tone, and she flushed deeply. "I'm sorry. It's—I was just thinking. The reunion to-morrow, you know, and it will be the first time I've seen Mildred and Vera and Angela since ——"

"But, my dear—haven't I told you again and again not to be foolishly sentimental about any of

the graduates? We're through with them, don't you understand? Now, if you cared to be nice to that little Emily Sturgis in the sophomore class, that would be different. She has some younger sisters who will be coming along, some day, and ——"

"Yes, Bert, but ——"

She was always starting to retort, then giving in to him helplessly. She commenced to write with obedient alacrity. In a moment the squeak of her pen was the one monotonous sound in that smugly well-appointed office. Dr. Shelborough had returned to his Acropolis.

2

The reunion that day was particularly large; there was only one vacant place—Vera's. Accounts of her tragic accident had appeared in the morning papers.

Whispers: "My dear,—isn't it dreadful?" "I nearly fainted when I read it!" "That just proves that you never know what will happen from one day to the next!" . . .

Everyone was round-eyed, horrified, thrilled. Vera had never been beloved; she was more idolized now than ever before.

A long table set in the reception room of the school. At its head Dr. Shelborough presiding in solemn grandeur, his wife insignificant beside him, swallowed up in his larger presence. The thirteen

members of the class of 1916 banking the sides of the table.

Mildred and Angela had chosen places as far from the principal as possible. Mildred was weeping into her grapefruit.

"To think that we promised that we'd all come back—we three—and tell what had happened to us in these five years. And now, Vera ——" she choked.

Angela put an arm around Milly's plump shoulders. "There now—don't cry. It isn't going to do any good. . . . But—but what kills me is that she had my book under her arm when she ——"

They fell silent. Presently Milly wiped her eyes. "It certainly isn't a very happy party, is it? Poor Mrs. Shelborough! I feel so sorry for her. She thought a lot of Vera."

Angela nodded. "Let's signal to her to come down here with us between courses. Maybe we could comfort her."

Mrs. Shelborough somewhat stealthily joined the two girls a moment later.

"I wanted to sit with you from the start, but the doctor thought I ought to be at the head, with him," she explained. "I think he's forgotten about me now, though. He's reading the notes for his speech—he had to change it when he heard about the accident."

Angela smiled faintly. "I suppose that would offer him an—opportunity."

Mrs. Shelborough gave an absent nod. "I was afraid you might have been telling each other your stories before I could come to you," she said timidly. "I wanted so much to hear what you two girls have done. Of course we know about Vera—she was so splendid! Will you tell me about yourselves?"

"Why, I thought ——" Milly stammered.

Angela faltered: "Oh, did you expect us to ——?"

They had tacitly abandoned the idea of recounting their lives, now that the triangle was broken. The omission would have been something of a relief to both. But Angela bravely faced the new contingency. If Mrs. Shelborough wanted to hear, they had certainly promised.

"Of course we'll tell you."

She arranged the events of the five years swiftly in her mind, unconsciously selecting certain occurrences that she was willing to have them know, discarding others—the more sacred phases of her life, the ones that had, in actuality, affected her most deeply. Valiantly she adjusted the smiling masque that was to hide the bitterness beneath.

"I'm sorry that it won't make a more interesting story. . . . The first year Grandmother and I went west, then I came back and did war work. The third year I played around—didn't do much of anything but have a good time, and I wrote a little. The fourth year I—well, it was a good deal like the

third. . . . And last year I wrote my novel. Is that a satisfactory account of myself?"

Mrs. Shelborough's eyes were wistful. "And are you happy, dear?"

"Don't you think I ought to be?" Angela laughed.

"Yes, and it's fine." Mrs. Shelborough turned to Mildred. "And you, Milly—won't you tell us all that's happened to you?"

Milly's hand fluttered to her yellow hair and across her forehead. The disguise, in her case, was so easily put on. She had only to giggle, widen her baby eyes, and start: "There isn't much to tell. . . . I—I eloped, you know. I ——" Her pink and white face lighted. "I married the best looking man—I want you both to meet him. We have a darling baby, a boy. He's so *good!* He never cries and he has the sweetest temper! We're—we're living up-town just now, but I hope we'll find a place in Morristown or Greenwich before long ——"

"And so you're happy, too?" Mrs. Shelborough gently inquired.

"Happy?" Milly cooed. "Why, Henry and I have never had a word! Not one solitary word!"

But Dr. Shelborough, at the head of the table, had discovered his wife's absence. He beckoned to her peremptorily, and she rose.

"I must go ——" she murmured hurriedly. "He needs me."

They watched her as she took her lowly place beside him, in the shade of his square elbow. Then they turned to one another again, awkwardly, uncertain how to recommence the conversation.

"That dress of yours, Milly—it's awfully attractive," Angela began.

"Do you like it?" Milly cried. "You know Henry adores this dress. It came from Mme. Darquenne's. He—he always likes me to go there."

"Rather a nice sort of husband to have," declared Angela. "One with good taste and—a generous purse. Eh, Milly?"

Milly's pink skin grew pinker. "Well,—Henry is doing so splendidly in business, and everything. He's so clever. And he always insists that I have what I want, regardless of cost. You know how men are—or maybe you don't. Why haven't you married, Angela? Don't you like men?"

"No, it isn't that," Angela denied. "It's simply ——" she smiled gaily. "Oh, you know—I'm wedded to my work!"

There was a fortunate hush just then. Dr. Shelborough had risen. He was clasping his thick fingers across his abdomen; it was evident that he was about to make his address. He cleared his throat.

"It has been a great shock to me, to all of us, to learn the . . . death . . . of one of our loved graduates. Mrs. Vera Henny Storm has upheld the traditions of the school so nobly"—(sniff) "that we may always point to her name

and honor it. My heart is bursting with the sorrow that has come upon us." (His handkerchief raised to his eyes.) "Little Vera! How well I remember her happy ways, her sweet, lovable personality—so unselfish, so ready to give the helping hand to others, no matter how humble! And I think, dear friends" (hoarsely, brokenly), "we may take her final act as a fitting example of the countless deeds that she so modestly accomplished every day of her short life.

"She was walking with her dog, her little pet dog that she loved with all her tender heart. And that Pekingese broke away and she saw the wheels of a surface car bearing down upon her love. Did she hesitate? Did she flinch from the path of sacrifice? Not she! She gave up her life—her most precious life—for the poor little helpless creature! That, my friends, was the Vera Henny whom we knew and loved. . . ."

People don't want to see us as we are any more than we wish to expose ourselves. Masques? Even in death we can't escape them.

3

As Angela and Mildred came out of the school door, Milly made a babyish gesture toward Fifth Avenue.

"I'm going over there to do some shopping. Which way do you go?"

"It doesn't matter," Angela replied. "I'll go along with you. I've nothing in particular to do."

They started walking west. Mildred's plump figure toddled beside Angela with an engagingly childlike tread.

"I think I'll see whether I can get another hat," she announced. "Henry likes this one, but it's sort of big. I want a smaller hat."

She was trying desperately to make the conversation seem easy; she had no intention of buying anything, but Angela and she had so little in common now. She began again: "I really ought to be starting home. It takes me so long——" she paused. That subject might lead to embarrassment. She didn't want Angela to know in quite how impossible a place she lived. Suddenly an idea struck her; there was something she could talk about and at least it was amusing.

"The funniest thing happened this morning, Angela. Wait till you hear! It's a scream!"

"Do tell me," Angela encouraged. "Don't leave me in suspense like this!"

"Well——" Milly took a deep breath. "It's a long story, but it all came out to-day in a letter that Mother got from some relatives of hers down south. It seems that we have an old great-uncle down in Georgia who has just died."

Angela started. "Oh . . . But—but surely that isn't the joke?"

"Not that part of it. The funny part is that he's

been sort of in his dotage for years, they say, and the family has just found out that he's been spreading around all kinds of things about us that aren't true. Why—Angela, what's the matter?"

Angela gripped Milly's plump arm. "Go on—please! What has he been saying?"

"Well, the worst thing was that we had some sort of a curse or something—he got us mixed up with another family who live down there in his town and they have deaf and dumb children and so ——"

"Oh, Milly! Milly—you don't mean ——" Angela's voice cracked. "Milly—does Mal know this?"

Milly's round face was puzzled. "No, I don't suppose so, yet. The letter only came this morning on the second mail and Mother ran up to see me before I left—that's when she told me about it. It's so ridiculous. Imagine my baby being deaf and dumb! There's never been such a thing in our whole family history, the letter said. But ——" she stopped abruptly, her mouth drooping and frightened. "Angela—what is it? What's the matter?"

"Oh, why didn't we know? Why didn't we?" The tears that Angela had kept back all those months flooded her soft, frank eyes, ran down her pale cheeks.

"Why—I thought you said you were happy," Milly remonstrated.

Angela laughed hysterically. "I am—I am!

Terribly, terribly happy! Milly—I'm going to say good-bye. I've got to find a 'phone!"

At the corner of Fifth Avenue and Forty-second Street Angela stood openly and joyously weeping, while she searched her bag for the five-cent piece that was to join her and Mal together for all time.

THE END

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